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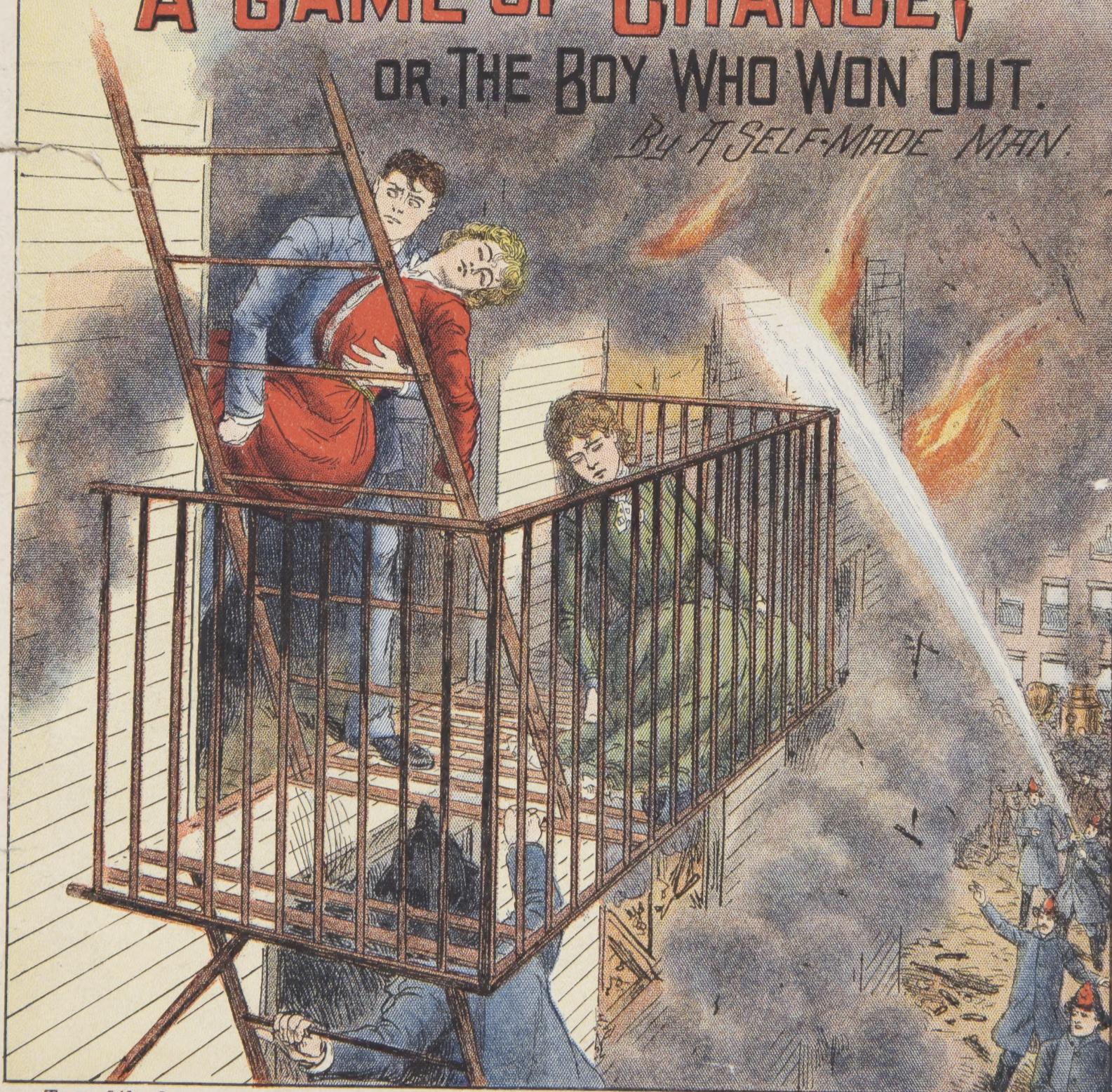
STORIES OF

BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

A GAME OF CHANCE;

OR, THE BOY WHO WON OUT.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



Two of the firemen started up the escape. Before they reached the platform, Will appeared again at the opening, this time with a burden in his arms. It was clear to those below that he held an insensible girl in his grasp.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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A Game of Chance;

OR,

THE BOY WHO WON OUT.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

WHICH INTRODUCES THREE IMPORTANT CHARACTERS.

"Please let me past, Mr. Jarvis," said a pretty but plainly-clad girl in a tone of remonstrance, as she stepped back and endeavored to walk around a well-dressed but not over prepossessing boy of seventeen years who had deliberately placed himself in her path.

"I've got something to say to you, Jessie Fairweather," answered the boy, changing his position so as to block her progress.

"But I want to go home," persisted the girl firmly.

"Pooh! You've lots of time. It's only half-past five."

"It's getting dark, and you have no right to detain me," protested the girl, with no little indignation.

"You ought to be glad to be seen talking to me," said the youth loftily.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to annoy me in this way."

"Who's annoying you? You're only a factory girl."

"I'm not ashamed of that fact. I suppose you consider yourself a gentleman?" the girl said scornfully.

"Of course I'm a gentleman," said the boy, elevating his chin proudly. "I don't have to work, and my father is the most important man in this town."

There was not the least doubt but that Lewis Jarvis had an excellent opinion of himself.

His father, Squire Jarvis, was the foremost lawyer in the town, a director of the National Bank, and a stockholder in the Northport cotton mills.

He lived in one of the most pretentious houses in the exclusive residential district, and naturally was looked upon and deferred to as a man of wealth and influence.

Lewis was impressed, as many boys are under such circumstances, with a sense of his own consequence, particularly, as being an only son, he was allowed his own way a good bit, and this made itself felt in his intercourse with his companions, as well as all others of less social importance with whom he came in contact.

Jessie Fairweather was an uncommonly pretty girl of sixteen years.

She had laughing blue eyes and a creamy complexion, set off with a wealth of golden hair that streamed about her shapely shoulders.

She was bright and piquant, and a general favorite among her companions.

Indeed, every one who had the slightest acquaintance with Miss Jennie liked her, for her disposition was lovable and her manners those of a little lady.

She lived with her mother and a young sister in a small,

unpretentious cottage on the outskirts of Northport, for the Fairweathers were in very moderate circumstances, which accounted for the fact that Jessie was employed in the cotton mills.

It is true Mrs. Fairweather owned the little home in which they lived, but this represented the sum total of their earthly possessions.

Captain Edward Fairweather, the husband and father, was supposed to have been lost at sea, for since the day, three years before, he sailed for Boston harbor in his good ship *Morning Star*, not a word had been heard of vessel or crew.

Although Lewis Jarvis associated with the better class of Northport's young people, he had what we may call a "sneaking" regard for Jessie Fairweather.

Her good looks and attractive ways had impressed him, and he figured that because she was poor she must naturally regard it as an honor for him to single her out from the other working girls.

But Jessie did not look at the matter in that light.

She had seen too much to dislike in Lewis Jarvis to regard him with favor, even if his father was reputed to be the richest man in Northport.

Therefore she resented his impertinence in thrusting his company upon her that afternoon when she came out on the street through the employee's entrance to the factory yard.

"Then, if you are a gentleman, you will allow me to pass," she said in response to Master Jarvis' lofty assertion.

"All right," agreed Lewis, "if you promise to let me see you home."

"I prefer to go home alone," making another effort to get by him.

"Not when you can get that pauper Will Somers to go along with you," cried the boy angrily, suddenly seizing her by the wrist.

At that moment a gate near at hand swung open, and a boy about his own age, with a bright, manly face, which, however, was somewhat disfigured by the grime of the engine-room, clad in a pair of overhauls and a check jumper, came out, wheeling an iron barrow filled with ashes and clinkers.

"Let go my hand, Mr. Jarvis!" cried Jessie, stamping her little foot resentfully.

"Will you let me go home with you?"

"No!" she cried, with a defiant toss of her head.

"Then you can't go until I choose to let you!" he retorted angrily.

"How dare you treat me in this manner?" she cried, with flashing eyes.

"Because I choose to do so."

The boy in the overhauls and jumper had seen Lewis Jarvis grab Jessie Fairweather by the wrist, and easily overheard all that followed.

His natural chivalry toward the fair sex told him it was time to interfere, even without reference to the fact that he looked upon the girl as a particular friend.

So he dropped the wheelbarrow, stepped up to the son of Northport's magnate, and laying his hand on his shoulder, said, with quiet determination:

"I think you had better let Miss Fairweather go home if she wants to."

Lewis started back in some little trepidation, for he knew he was in the wrong, and Jessie took advantage of the moment to snatch her hand from his grasp.

But when he recognized who it was that had interfered his brow grew as black as thunder-gust, and he snorted:

"What do you mean, you pauper, you! How dare you lay your dirty hand on me!"

"I interferred because you were annoying Miss Fairweather," said the newcomer in straightforward tones, and he raised his soft felt hat politely to the girl.

"You common fireman! I've a good mind to—"

He doubled up his fists in a threatening manner, but the calm, undaunted look which the other gave him convinced Lewis that discretion was the better part of valor.

"How dare you butt in where you're not wanted?"

"If you can convince me that I was in the wrong, I am willing to apologize," said the working lad, with a genial smile.

"You were not in the wrong, Will Somers," spoke up Jessie Fairweather quickly. "Mr. Jarvis was acting in a very rude way to me, and I am very much obliged to you for coming to my aid."

"You hear that, Lewis Jarvis?" said Will grimly. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"None of your business what I have to say! But I'll tell you one thing, smart aleck, I'll get square with you for this."

"All right," responded Somers cheerfully. "I think, however, you owe Miss Fairweather an apology for your conduct toward her."

"If you don't get down on your knees right now and beg my pardon for sticking your nose into my affairs, I'll see that you're discharged to-morrow from your job in the factory engine-room," threatened Jarvis hotly.

"Much obliged for your kind intention, Lewis Jarvis," returned Will Somers disdainfully; "but when I get down on my knees to you, just let me know, will you?"

"Bah! you common laborer!" cried the Squire's son in a rage. "My father is one of the owners of this mill. He's only got to say the word to have you fired. I'll see that he does it," he added vindictively.

"Your father isn't the only stockholder, nor the biggest one, Lewis Jarvis," retorted Will calmly. "I may be a common mechanic, as you say, but I understand my business here and attend to it, so I don't think the superintendent will discharge me without sufficient reason. Simply to oblige you isn't any reason at all."

"You'll see," replied Jarvis, darkly, moving off without paying any further attention to Jessie Fairweather, who had not taken advantage of this controversy to continue on her way, but stood by, hoping her presence would prevent a serious mix-up between the two boys.

Maybe there was another reason, too, for it was a fact that Jessie greatly admired young Will Somers.

She knew he was a good boy, an earnest, hard worker, the sole support of a widowed mother and a younger brother and sister.

She knew that everybody that knew Will liked him, because he was polite and gentlemanly to all, and considerate of the feelings of even the smallest girl or boy in the factory.

She knew that a considerable part of his spare time was spent in study, in order to better his condition. He had an eye to the future.

Will Somers was generally recognized about the mills as a smart boy.

He had lately invented an improvement in the damper regulator of the engine, which had proved an economizer of coal, and a patent for it had been applied for in his name by the superintendent, who, in recognition of its benefit in the engine-room, had given him a welcome increase in salary.

He was now at work on another scheme, designed to recover and utilize a larger percentage of the wasted steam.

This was a project that engaged the attention of many of the brightest minds in the engineering line at that very moment, for it was known that by far the greater proportion of the units of the mist formed by condensed vapor, otherwise known as steam, went to waste; consequently any invention which would serve to utilize a larger number of those infinitesimal particles would prove of untold value in economizing the coal consumption.

As Lewis Jarvis turned on his heel and strode away, his small mind brooding upon the retaliation he hoped to be able to inflict on the boy who had dared to cross him, Jessie walked up to Will, and holding out her hand, said:

"I hope you will understand that I am very grateful to you for what you did for me, and I trust you will not get into any trouble over it."

"Don't worry about that, Jessie; I'm not afraid of anything Lewis Jarvis can do with such a lame excuse to work upon. I am very glad I was able to be of service to you, for there is no girl I would sooner——"

And then he stopped in embarrassment.

"Thank you," she answered, with just the suspicion of a blush. "Isn't it most time for you to go home?"

"Yes; if you wouldn't mind waiting a few minutes I'll be happy to escort you home," he said eagerly.

"I'll wait, for it's getting quite dark now, and I should be glad to have you with me."

Five minutes later they left the yard of the engine-house together.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH LEWIS JARVIS, HAVING FAILED TO GET SQUARE WITH WILL SOMERS, DECIDES TO EVEN UP THINGS WITH JESSIE FAIRWEATHER.

Superintendent Harper of the Northport cotton mills was in his office on the morning following the affair men-

tioned in the previous chapter, when Squire Jarvis walked in unannounced.

"Good-morning, Mr. Harper," said the magnate blandly.

"Well, Squire Jarvis, in what way can I be of service to you?" asked the superintendent, wheeling about in his chair.

"Ahem! I'm sorry that I have to make a serious complaint against one of your employees," began the nabob somewhat brusquely.

"Indeed! I regret to hear that such is the reason of your visit. Who is the person to whom you refer, and what is the nature of the offence?"

"I will explain, sir. My son Lewis happened to be in this neighborhood last evening at half-past five, which is the hour the mill shuts down for the day, I believe."

The superintendent nodded.

He stopped to speak to one of the girls—her name is Fairweather, I believe—when a boy by the name of Somers, employed in the engine-room, came up, and laying one of his greasy hands on my son's clean clothes, broke up the interview by saying it was time for the girl to go home. Lewis very properly resented this unwarranted interference, whereupon the Somers boy insulted him in a gross manner."

"I am sorry to hear you bring such a charge against young Somers, Squire Jarvis. Are you sure there isn't some mistake? Will Somers is the brightest boy in this establishment, and is noted for his gentlemanly conduct."

"No mistake, whatever," answered the Squire positively. "My son stated the case very fairly to me. I judged from his manner that he rather underestimated the gravity of the offence, being unwilling, no doubt, to have his aggressor too severely punished, which is to his credit. As a large stockholder in this company, I wish you to understand that I cannot permit by son to be insulted by one of the employees. I therefore request that you will immediately discharge this Somers boy."

"I will take the matter under consideration, Squire Jarvis," politely responded the superintendent. "The charge will be investigated. It is only fair that young Somers be given a hearing in his own defence. I will also hear what Miss Fairweather has to say about it. Tell your son to call here at two o'clock this afternoon and I will listen to his side of the question. If I find that Will Somers has not treated your son fairly I will see that he is disciplined."

"I should think, Mr. Harper, that my statement of the case ought to be sufficient," said the nabob pompously. "My son would not lie to me. He has too much respect for himself and the position he occupies in society to make a charge not founded on fact. I may say this is not the first time this Somers boy has failed in according my son the respect to which he is entitled."

"It is a rule of mine never to proceed against any employee without having thoroughly sifted the evidence in the case. As a lawyer you understand that every one, no matter how humble his or her position, is entitled to an equal show of justice."

"Very well," responded the nabob stiffly. "I shall expect that you will look into this thing at once. As soon as the Somers boy's offence has been shown to your satisfaction I look to you to discharge him immediately."

Superintendent Harper made no reply to this, and the Squire taking his silence in an affirmative sense, rose from the chair, bowed coldly and left the office.

"This isn't at all like Will Somers," muttered Mr. Harper, after he had sent to the engine-room for the boy. "Young Jarvis has evidently exaggerated the affair to suit his own views."

Will presently reported at the superintendent's office, clad in his overhauls and jumper, and his bright, manly, young face favorably impressed the official whose duty it was to pass on the merits of the alleged difficulty.

"You wished to see me, Mr. Harper?" asked the lad modestly.

"Yes, Will. I regret to say a charge has been made against you by Squire Jarvis. He has just left."

"I expected it," replied the boy cheerfully. "Lewis Jarvis and I had a run-in last night about closing time, and he threatened to tell his father and have me discharged."

The superintendent smiled good-naturedly.

"I will hear what you have to say about it," he said kindly.

Will at once rehearsed the cause of the trouble, and referred to Jessie Fairweather for corroboration of his story.

Mr. Harper nodded, as if he put a good deal of faith in the boy's statement.

"I will send for the lady in the case," he said genially. "You may return to the engine-room. Rest assured you will be treated with perfect fairness."

Jessie Fairweather was called down from the operating room, and she backed up Will's story with an earnestness that called up a smile to the superintendent's face.

"I see you have a friendly feeling for Will Somers," he said.

"I have," she replied, without any embarrassment. "He has been very kind to mother and myself, and I'm sure I like him very much."

"That is all, Miss Fairweather."

"You don't think he will be discharged for taking my part, do you, sir?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't think you need worry about that," he replied, with a quizzical smile.

"Thank you."

Much against his will, Lewis Jarvis called on the superintendent that afternoon and gave his version of the difficulty.

His statement showed so much personal rancor against Will that the brief cross-examination to which he was subjected convinced Mr. Harper that there was no ground on which to proceed against Will in the matter, and accordingly he dismissed the charge, writing a note to Squire Jarvis to that effect.

Lewis was very much dissatisfied with the outcome of the affair.

Having failed to get square with Will Somers, he now transferred a portion of his enmity to Jessie Fairweather.

"She's a stuck-up thing for a poor mill hand," he said to himself with an air of disgust, as he was retiring for the night. "I'd like to take her down a peg or two. I believe she's stuck on that mechanic, and he acts as if he was gone on her. If I could only manage to get her fired from the factory 'twould make them both feel sore, and so I could kill two birds with one stone. I know what I'll do. Tessie Rickson is jealous of her. She likes Somers herself. Perhaps I can put something into Tessie's head that'll give her a chance to get that Fairweather girl into trouble. She'll grab at such a scheme in a minute. If it works, it'll be all right; if it doesn't, and Tessie gets into trouble over it, why, that'll be her lookout. In any case, I don't risk anything. I'll see her to-morrow. It'll be a cold day when things don't come my way."

With which charitable reflection he hopped into bed and was soon asleep.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH LEWIS JARVIS INTERVIEWS TESSIE RICKSON, AND
AFTERWARDS HEARS SOMETHING THAT GIVES
HIM GREAT SATISFACTION.

The factory hands had an hour for lunch, and most of the girls went home for the midday meal.

Tessie Rickson was one of these, and Lewis Jarvis, in accordance with his amiable intentions toward Jessie Fairweather, took care to meet her as if by accident on the way to her father's cottage.

Miss Rickson was a tall, somewhat angular young person, with red hair, which, however, she referred to as auburn, a freckled face, a vinegary-looking mouth and a turned-up nose.

While she wasn't prepared to admit even to herself what other people could see with half an eye—that she was decidedly plain, so far as looks were concerned—she was jealous of every girl who received more attention from the boys than herself.

She was particularly down on Jessie Fairweather because everybody said Jessie was the prettiest girl in Northport, and chiefly because she (Tessie) was somewhat sweet on Will Somers, and all the other girls said Jessie was Will's sweetheart.

Had she been mentally capable of originating any plan to get square with the captain's daughter she would have put it into practice long ago.

Fortunately, her powers in that direction were rather limited.

But she was mean and reckless enough to put into execution any scheme that might be suggested to her, that had for its object the humiliation of Jessie Fairweather.

Consequently, as Lewis Jarvis had surmised, she was an easy tool for him to use.

"Good-afternoon, Tessie," said Lewis, taking off his hat to her.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Jarvis," she replied, pleased to be addressed by the nabob's son.

"I s'pose you don't object to my company for a little way, do you?" he said, with a smirk, intended to be fetching.

"Not at all; on the contrary, I shall consider it an honor," she answered, hoping some of her girl friends would see her walking with the magnate's son, and that the sight would make them turn green with jealousy.

"It's too bad that such a pretty girl as you should have to work on such a pleasant day," proceeded the astute Master Jarvis, with a polite grin.

"Isn't it?" cried Tessie, in a discontented tone. "However, I don't expect to work always, Mr. Jarvis."

"Sure you won't. Some rich young fellow, like myself, for instance, will come along and snap you up when you aren't thinking."

"I'm afraid the other girls would all be jealous of me, then," said Tessie, delighted at the suggestion, which had not occurred to her before.

"I guess they would, especially Jessie Fairweather. I ~~are~~ ^{she} doesn't like you for a cent," said Lewis artfully, "and doesn't care who knows it."

"I hate her!" snapped Miss Rickson vindictively.

"She isn't so much, though she seems to think half the boys are crazy over her," continued the boy. "Do you think she's so pretty?"

"No, I don't; do you?" asked Tessie, with compressed lips.

"Not by a jugful. I like the color of your hair much better than hers."

"Do you really? You are making fun of me, ain't you?" she asked doubtfully.

"I'm not. Her hair is nice enough in its way, but yours is the most fashionable shade. I heard my mother say so."

A whopper or two by the boy did not worry his conscience a great deal when they assisted him in the attainment of some object he had in view.

Miss Rickson was very pleased to hear that Mrs. Jarvis, the leader of Northport society, had actually noticed and favorably commented on her hair.

She would take care that all the girls she knew should hear about it.

"If I were you I wouldn't stand for Jessie Fairweather going about and telling the other girls that you had caroty hair and—"

"Did she say that?" almost gasped Tessie, with flashing eyes.

"Not only caroty hair," added Lewis, smothering a grin with his hand, "but freckles as large as warts—"

"The idea!" screamed Miss Rickson, now as mad as a hornet. "The mean, artful creature!"

"That isn't all," went on Lewis, in his soft way. "I suppose you wouldn't believe she said your mouth was big enough to eat snowballs?"

"I'll get square with her for that," snapped the thoroughly enraged girl, clenching her coarse, brown hands.

"That's right. I wouldn't let any one crow over or

make fun of me," said Lewis, egging the poor, deluded girl on. "I heard she was making fun of you before Will Somers the other night. Said you were only a bundle of bones—she was afraid to touch you for fear you'd rattle, and somebody might think one of the machines was out of order."

"Oh, I'll fix her, the flaxen-haired thing!" exclaimed Tessie furiously.

"Look here," said Lewis, tapping her on the shoulder, "do you know what a girl once did to another girl who talked about her in that way?"

"No, I don't; what did she do?" asked Miss Rickson, with some interest.

"She got her fired from the shop where they both worked."

"Served her right. I'd give a good deal to get that washed-out blonde discharged from our place."

"This girl managed, somehow or other, to have a purse that did not belong to her found in one of the other girl's pockets. She was accused of theft, and as she couldn't prove she didn't take it, she was thrown out by the boss. It ought to be easy to work a thing like that. Now, mind, I don't tell you to do it—you've got too kind a heart to do anything like that, I know."

"Oh, yes," gritted the furious maiden, grasping at the idea like a drowning man at a straw, "I'm too kind-hearted. I wouldn't think of doing such a thing. But how do you know this pasty-faced Miss Fairweather would not steal a purse if she got the chance?"

"That's a fact," admitted Lewis, humoring her.

"And if 'twas found on her 'twould show she was really a thief, wouldn't it?"

"Sure it would," snickered Lewis, now feeling sure of the girl.

"I shouldn't be surprised if something like that actually did happen. We girls are very careless with our purses. If I should miss mine I'll know who to accuse."

By that time they had reached the gate of the poor-looking Rickson cottage, and Lewis was on the point of bidding the girl good-by, when Job Rickson, her father, appeared at the door, and asked him if he would not walk in, as he wanted to see him about a matter of importance.

Young Jarvis was not anxious for an interview with Tessie's father, but as he saw no way out of it, he followed the girl into the house.

While she repaired to the dining-room to get her dinner, the old man led Lewis into the darkened sitting-room, and asked him to sit down near his old mahogany escritoire.

Job Rickson looked older than he really was.

He was thin and spare like his daughter, with closely-cropped caroty hair and freckled features.

He was mean and miserly by disposition, and though he had a fat account in the town savings bank, he always declared he was not worth a cent.

He kept his house and property in poor shape so as to hoodwink the assessor, but after all he deceived nobody so much as himself.

He often loaned money to his neighbors, on the best of security, of course.

While the State law prevented him from exacting usurious interest, he had ways and means of getting around the law that were unique.

"Do you think your father would be willing to collect a note for me?" began Mr. Rickson.

"Sure! Why not? That's part of his business, isn't it?" said Lewis in some surprise.

"I thought I'd ask you, because this here note's been runnin' a long time, and I hain't made no great attempt to collect it, 'cause the party hain't any too well fixed, you see, and it kind of goes agin' my grain to push poor people to the wall."

"The note isn't outlawed, is it?" asked Master Jarvis suspiciously.

"No; not for four months yet."

"It's good, then. How much is it for?"

"Three hundred dollars. I really can't afford to lose so much money."

"Who is it against?"

"It is signed by Nat Somers. He's dead, you know; but I reckon his widder is responsible for it."

"Who did you say?" said Lewis, in some excitement. "Nat Somers, Will Somers' father?"

"You've got it jest right, young man," replied Mr. Rickson, nodding his head.

"You give me that note, Mr. Rickson," cried Lewis, jumping to his feet, "and my father'll collect it for you all right."

The old man promptly produced the note in question, and after the boy had looked it over to see that it was all right he started for his father's office.

"By the great hornspron!" he ejaculated. "This is luck. I don't believe Mrs. Somers will be able to pay it. This is where I have got the squeeze on that low-down mechanic, Will Somers. You'll put your greasy paws on me, will you? Oh, father and I won't do a thing to you this time, you pauper! I've got you where I want you now, and I'll make you eat humble pie, all right."

With this pious feeling in his mind he hurried along the street.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GAME OF CHANCE.

As the Fairweather and Somers homesteads, of some five acres each, adjoined one another on the suburbs of Northport, it was quite the usual thing of late for Will and Jessie to go home together after their day's work.

At closing time on the day that Master Jarvis had his interview with Tessie Rickson, Jessie found Will waiting for her at the gate.

"I'm on time to-night, all right," he said in a tone of satisfaction, as he bowed politely to several of the other girls passing out at the moment. "Are you glad?"

"I am afraid it will make you dreadfully conceited if I admit I am," said Jessie, with a tantalizing little laugh. "You boys do think such an awful lot of yourselves."

"Come, now, Jessie, you're too hard on us," remonstrated Will with a grin, as they started off together.

"Am I? Really. Why, I never look at Lewis Jarvis but I almost fancy the world isn't quite large enough to hold him comfortably," laughed the girl.

"Lewis Jarvis is in a class all by himself, so far as this town is concerned. I shouldn't feel at all flattered if you compared me with him."

"I certainly wouldn't think of doing such a thing. He isn't a real boy. And just think, he calls himself a gentleman, because he doesn't have to work and because his father is looked upon as one of the biggest men in town. A gentleman wouldn't act the way he did the night before last," said Jessie scornfully.

"I should say not," answered Will emphatically. "He didn't lose any time trying to get me bounced because I interfered in your behalf. But his pull didn't seem to work. He's mean enough to do most anything. Of course, he's got it in for me now, but I ain't afraid of anything he can do. There isn't anything against me at the mill, and I don't propose there shall be, as I make it a point to attend strictly to my business during working hours."

"Mother says you're bound to become a successful man if you live," said the girl, with a look of admiration at her escort.

"That's what I'm aiming for," replied the boy, with modest confidence.

"You intend to become an engineer, I suppose?"

"Certainly; but I don't mean to stop at that. One of these days I hope to own at least a part of a mill myself, and a thorough knowledge of the requirements of the engine-room ought to be of great value to the proprietor himself."

"You are aiming high, Will," said Jessie with a smile.

"I think every young fellow ought to aim high in this world if he ever expects to land in a good place where he can make money."

"That's something many boys, Lewis Jarvis, for instance, don't feel called upon to worry about. The money is already provided for them in advance."

"All the same, I wouldn't change places with Lewis Jarvis. Money isn't everything, not by a long shot. It sometimes has wings and disappears all of a sudden. If he puts all his reliance in his father's wealth, and it should happen to get away from him one of these days after he has grown up, where will he be at?"

"I'm not good at guessing conundrums, Will," laughed the girl. "And that reminds me of a conundrum with which you are connected, and which I've been trying hard to solve ever since last winter."

"What's that, Jessie?" asked the boy curiously.

"The girls all call it Will Somers' Folly whenever they speak about it."

"Oh, I know what you refer to now," grinned the boy, "and perhaps they may be right, though until the fact be proved I must beg to differ with them. I call it a game of chance—it's a toss-up whether I come out ahead or not; but I think the odds, if anything, should be in

my favor, for I have worked the thing on a sort of scientific basis. While I feel confident I have gone the right way about it to reach results, it doesn't follow that I shall succeed. When dealing with such a treacherous proposition as the 'quaking bog,' as the people call it, or the ten-acre swamp-lot, as I call it, a fellow can't feel very sure where he's going to come out. Success means a good thing, Jessie; failure means—well, the loss of twenty-five dollars cash, and a great many hours of the hardest work I ever put in in my life. But, worst of all, it will mean the 'grand laugh' at my expense."

"Do let me into the secret, won't you?" said Jessie, persuasively. "For there is a secret, I know. You're too smart a boy to go into any scheme blindfolded. It isn't like you. It may be a game of chance, as you call it; but I'm certain there's some method in your madness."

"Well, Jessie, at least I had the advantage of one man's failure to give me a wrinkle before I went into the thing."

"It was such a total failure that I wonder you ever took up with it."

"That's what it was. When Mr. Rickson bought that swamp-lot at what he thought was a bargain, he was under the impression that all he had to do was to erect a strong dam across the outlet of the bog at the beginning of cold weather, and by confining the water which constantly soaked into the swamp from the springs and small streams from the ledgy hills above, overflow the lot. At first nobody, including myself, could understand what he was trying to get at."

"I remember," laughed Jessie; "but when the boom in ice began, and the papers were full of accounts of almost fabulous prices paid for 'ice privileges' which lay convenient for shipping, whether they were mill-ponds or freshwater marshes, the object of Mr. Rickson's dam was apparent."

"Just so," agreed Will. "He intended to overflow the swamp and make a ten-acre pond. From the pond thus formed to the wharf below is about two hundred yards, and a descending grade all the way—so that by means of a cheap chute the ice, after having been marked out and cut into proper size chunks, could be sent sliding down to the very verge of the wharf, there to be taken on board of vessels ready to receive it. It was a great scheme, wasn't it?"

"Yes; but, unfortunately for Mr. Rickson, it turned out a great failure."

"That's right. Still, how could he guess that the very effort he made to flood the surface of the lot would merely cause the swamp itself to rise until it was nearly level with the land around it?"

"What made it act that way? One would naturally think that the incoming water, finding its escape cut off, would form a pond there."

"That's the way Mr. Rickson figured; but here's how he came to get left: The roots of the moss and matted grass of which the swamp was composed could find no holding ground in the soft black mud underneath, so that the inflowing water, finding itself deprived of its usual out-

let by the dam, raised the whole mass with it. There was no lack of water, don't you see; but it was under the surface of the swamp, instead of overflowing it."

"What a shame!" giggled Jessie, as the ludicrous side of the affair came to her.

"Yes, it was tough on Mr. Rickson, who had expected to sell the ice privilege for several thousand dollars."

"I should think that ought to have been lesson enough for you," said Jessie, with an inquiring look.

"It was, only not in the sense you look at it. I admit I gave Mr. Rickson the laugh with the rest, and several times I visited the place to look at the 'sell.' It was on one of those occasions that an idea came to me. So I set my wits to work to put it into tangible shape. I studied the character of the swamp, and the result was satisfactory. Then I sought means to carry out my plan. I found them at hand. All that remained was the manual labor, for which I could not afford to pay. So I tackled it myself when I could find the time, and you can gamble on it, Jessie, there wasn't an ounce of fun in it."

"I shouldn't think there was," admitted the girl, judging from what you told me at the time; though you would not gratify my curiosity by telling me the reason for a proceeding which seemed so senseless to every one who heard about it."

"Well, I'm telling you now, but you must keep it quiet."

"I won't say a word, honor bright," protested Jessie.

"I bought the swamp-lot and the dam just as it stood from Mr. Rickson for twenty-five dollars. I agreed to remove a big heap of stones, as tall as a barn, from Farmer Botts' land hard by, on condition that he would let me have the use of his ox-team for that purpose."

"He must have thought you were crazy."

"Probably he did, but he wasn't fool enough to say so, as he had the soft end of the bargain. When the swamp-lot had frozen over so that it would bear the ox-team I began to use up all of my spare time of night hauling rocks from Boggs' field to the basin in which lay the swamp-lot, and I spread them in heaps over the surface of the ice. I'd hate to tell you how many tons I deposited there before the end of winter. I was mighty glad when I got away with the last load."

"I know all about that, Will Somers—everybody knows it. Lots of people have gone over there and looked at those piles of rocks and wondered what you were trying to get at, but they couldn't guess any more than I."

"As it wasn't any business of theirs, I didn't take the trouble to enlighten them. I haven't any use for butters-in, Jessie."

"Do you include me in that remark, Will? If you remember, I was just as curious as anybody else," said the girl, with a quizzical smile.

"Present company always accepted," said the boy hastily, whereat she laughed gaily.

"Well," she said, "I'm waiting patiently for this explanation you promised to give me. I'm still as much in the dark as ever."

"After I had finished with the rocks I took down part

of the dam and waited. When the ice began to melt with the coming of spring the stones gradually disappeared among the moss and grass. Then the swamp looked the same as it ever did. Since then I've simply been waiting."

"For what, pray?"

"For winter to set in again. This is October. In a week or so I'll repair the dam and let the water collect. I expect it will be on the surface, not under the swamp this time."

"Why should it be different with you than what it was with Mr. Rickson?"

"Because I trust that the rocks, which have gone down pretty evenly into the matted grass and moss, will anchor down the entire surface of the bog. Should this prove to be the case, the formation of a ten-acre pond will be a simple proposition."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jessie, a great light dawning in upon her mind.

"If it does I shall have as pretty a pond as you ever saw in your life, and a field of clear ice worth at least \$3,000 or \$4,000."

"What a head you've got, Will Somers!" cried the girl, in admiration of his genius.

"If I fail my name will resemble the soil under the swamp."

"What is that?" asked Jessie in surprise.

"Mud!" ejaculated Will tersely.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH SQUIRE JARVIS VISITS THE SOMERS' HOME.

The quaint little Dutch timepiece which Captain Fairweather had brought from Holland some years before, and afterward presented to Nathaniel Somers, his neighbor, and which occupied a conspicuous position on the mantel of the sitting-room in the Somers home, had just struck the hour of eight, when a loud, authoritative knock came on the front door.

"I wonder who can that be?" said Mrs. Somers, looking up in mild wonder.

Will, who was pouring over a new book on practical engineering which he had got from the town public library, jumped up and went to the door.

He was surprised, and perhaps not a little apprehensive, to find that the visitor was none other than the pompous Squire Jarvis.

What could be the meaning of this great man's visit to their humble home?

"Is Mrs. Somers at home?" asked the lawyer stiffly.

"Yes, sir," replied Will, respectfully. "Will you walk in?"

Squire Jarvis brushed past the boy with as little consideration as though he was a wooden image, and Mrs. Somers rose hastily from her chair as his portly form filled the door leading into the sitting-room.

"Squire Jarvis!" she exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, ma'am," answered the nabob, in a tone that seemed to indicate that he was conferring a distinguished honor on the cottage by his presence there.

"Take the rocking-chair," said the lady of the house, pointing to a substantial piece of furniture that was the pride of the house.

The Squire bowed condescendingly, seated himself, and glanced curiously about the room.

Mrs. Somers reseated herself and waited for the great man to explain the nature of his unexpected call.

"Ahem, ma'am," began the Squire, feeling that what he had to say was not likely to cause a pleasant impression, "I have called in reference to a little matter that has been placed in my hands."

Mrs. Somers bowed and waited for him to proceed.

At this moment Will re-entered the room, and took up a position in the background, curious to learn, as he half suspected, if he was the cause of the magnate's visit.

He was soon undeceived.

"I refer to a note of hand, signed by your late husband in favor of Job Rickson, for the sum of \$300. The note," continued the Squire, fishing out his glasses and poising them with a sort of professional movement upon the bridge of his aristocratic nose, and then taking out a bulky morocco pocketbook, from which he deliberately extracted the document in question, "is dated February 1, 189~~9~~, and expired one year from date, when it became due and payable, according to the terms therein expressed. It should have been presented for payment at that time. But your husband having died in the meanwhile, leaving you, ahem, in somewhat straightened circumstances, so far as ready money was concerned, Mr. Rickson refrained from calling immediately on you for the amount owing him, feeling sure you would recognize his claim as soon as you were in a position less financially embarrassing. While this was not business, it reflects a great credit on Mr. Rickson's goodness of heart—a fact, I regret to say, not generally appreciated by his acquaintances. In fact, he has delayed so long the presentation of this note that it is now within a few months of the time when, according to the laws of the State, it would have become outlawed, and consequently worthless. Fortunately, he called my attention to it, and I advised him to collect it at once, and so he turned it over to me for that purpose. Therefore, I should be glad to learn what you are prepared to do about it."

Squire Jarvis having delivered himself of the foregoing in his most impressive manner, he removed his glasses from their perch and began to twirl them around his index finger while he regarded the little brown-haired widow with a judicial sort of look, possibly with the view of confusing and intimidating her.

Mrs. Somers had listened to him with the utmost amazement, but politely forbore interrupting him.

But when he had concluded she said quietly:

"That note was taken up by my husband a few days before his death and paid."

"Paid, ma'am!" ejaculated the lawyer.

"Yes, sir; and Mr. Rickson gave my husband a receipt for the money."

"You certainly are laboring under a misapprehension of the facts. If your husband paid this note, it stands to

reason it would not now be in the possession of Mr. Rickson. When a note is settled it is always delivered to the person who drew it, by whom it is, or should be, immediately destroyed."

"I think I can account for the fact that it happens to be in Mr. Rickson's possession," said Mrs. Somers, a slight note of scorn in her tone.

"I am ready to hear any explanation you have to make," said the lawyer stiffly.

"That he presents it at this late day for repayment does not speak well for that goodness of heart you have just credited him with," said the little lady coldly.

"Ma'am," interrupted Squire Jarvis severely, "you must not attack the character of such an old and respected citizen as Mr. Rickson."

"I was about to explain to you why Mr. Somers did not get possession of that note at the time he paid the money. The note still had several months to run when he expressed his intention of taking it up. Mr. Rickson at first objected, but when my husband offered him the year's interest he accepted the money and gave a receipt for the same, saying he would give up the note in a few days, as soon as he got it from the bank, where he had deposited it for safe keeping. My husband, probably feeling that he was protected by the receipt, did not hurry him. In fact, before he may have thought of the matter again, he met with the accident which resulted, unfortunately for himself and family, in his premature death."

Mrs. Somers paused and wiped away a tear.

"Your statement is certainly plausible," admitted Squire Jarvis, beginning to fear he had called on a fool's errand, after all, and that the unsavory reputation Mr. Rickson bore in town, with which the Squire was familiar, was once more cropping up in evidence. "If you have Mr. Rickson's receipt for the three hundred dollars, of course I shall have nothing more to say. I am not responsible for any act of Mr. Rickson's, ma'am, being merely his agent in the matter. If it is not too much trouble, will you kindly produce the receipt, so that I may convince myself of its genuineness?"

"I am sorry to say that the receipt has been mislaid ever since my husband's death," replied Mrs. Somers, not without some apprehension as to what effect this honest admission would have on the lawyer.

"Mislaid, ma'am!" exclaimed the Squire, raising his eyebrows in a way that might have implied that he thought such a statement rather thin.

"Yes, sir," replied the little widow, with a slight touch of indignation in her voice, for the Squire's pantomime had not escaped her.

"Very singular," he remarked, tapping the note with his glasses, "very singular, indeed."

"I hope you don't think I am not telling the truth?" with a quiet scorn that disturbed him.

"Not at all, not at all," he replied hastily. "I never doubt a lady's word; but people are often mistaken, ma'am. You—"

"There is no mistake in this case, Squire Jarvis," said

Mrs. Somers firmly. "I regret to say I have not been able to find the receipt. As Mr. Rickson made no effort to recollect the note when it became due, nor at any time during the years that have since elapsed, I naturally presumed it was all right, and gave no further thought to the matter. I must say it is a singular thing for him to present it for payment now, within a few weeks of the time when, as you say, it would become outlawed. I will not express my opinion as to his motives, but will leave you to judge that yourself."

"Well, ma'am," said the wily lawyer, scratching the point of his nose with the rim of his glasses, "it is certainly unfortunate that you cannot produce the receipt. As the case stands, Mr. Rickson has the law on his side, and so, unless you can find the receipt, I am afraid you will have to pay the money over again."

"But, sir," cried the widow, aghast, "that would be most unjust."

"The law, ma'am, passes only upon facts; it has nothing whatever to do with sentiment. People should not be careless—therein lies the cause of much trouble in this world that we lawyers are often called upon to unravel, and not always with success. If your husband had insisted upon the immediate return of the note, which was well within his rights, or you had not lost the receipt, which would to all intents and purposes answer the same end, you would not now be in this trouble."

"I consider it an outrage that Mr. Rickson should make this demand when he well knows that he was paid once," cried Mrs. Somers, in great indignation.

"With that I have nothing whatever to do, ma'am," said the nabob, rising and taking his hat. "I am simply acting on the instructions of my client, with the evidence he has produced, and which you seem unable to gainsay. I will give you a week to consider what you will do, at the end of which time I shall expect you to call or send to my office and advise me of your determination."

"But I cannot agree to pay that note over again," she said, almost tearfully.

"In that case the law will have to take its course."

"Do you mean to say, sir, that the law will rob my mother of another three hundred dollars?" demanded Will, facing the magnate of Northport.

Squire Jarvis glared at the boy as though astonished at the lad's audacity in addressing him so boldly.

"I mean to say, young man, that your mother will have to go to court and show cause why judgment on this note, together with interest to date, shall not be rendered in favor of Mr. Rickson. If she loses, which she is bound to do unless she produces the alleged receipt, she will also have to pay the costs of the action, which will raise the total amount to something over four hundred and fifty dollars."

"And if we refuse to pay that?" said the boy, with flashing eyes.

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"This property which is in your mother's name will be sold to satisfy the judgment, and the expenses of the sale,

with the sheriff's fees, will also be added to the sum I have mentioned. You will find it a costly matter to fight against the law. I advise you not to try it."

Thus speaking, Squire Jarvis walked majestically toward the front door, and Will, oppressed by a sense of utter helplessness to resist the swindle about to be perpetrated on his mother, followed and let him out.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGE VISITOR TO THE TOOL-HOUSE.

"What shall we do, my son?" asked Mrs. Somers in a troubled voice when Will returned to the sitting-room.

"I don't know, mother. I suppose you will have to consult a lawyer. I never believed Mr. Rickson to be such a contemptible swindler," he added bitterly.

"He is certainly trying to do us a grievous wrong," said his mother sadly.

"Mother, why did father borrow three hundred dollars from Mr. Rickson?"

"Because he wished to secure a strip of ground belonging to the Peasley estate, which lay between the end of our property and the river. He had long tried to get possession of it, for, small as it was, he knew that it would more than double the value of our own land, by giving it a water frontage. Until old Mr. Peasley died the strip of ground was not for sale. The chance to purchase it was suddenly offered to your father, and rather than lose the opportunity, which might not have occurred again, he decided to raise the amount on his note. A contract, which he completed just before he was struck down, enabled him to return the money to Mr. Rickson before the note matured. Your father was not a suspicious man. He credited others with the same honesty he himself possessed. That's why he did not insist on Mr. Rickson giving up that note immediately. Had he lived, of course things would have been different. Mr. Rickson never would have dared——"

"I should say not," said Will indignantly. "He thinks that because he has a woman to deal with he can take undue advantage of the situation. You have no idea where that receipt went to, then, mother?"

"Unfortunately, I have not."

"You must make a thorough search of the house at once, and I will get Jessie to help you."

"I will do so, of course. It would be a great misfortune if this property was taken from us to satisfy such an unjust claim."

"Don't worry, mother. It shall not be taken from you."

"You speak hopefully, my son; but I fear we are in a sad predicament."

"There, mother, we'll let the thing drop for to-night. You look for the paper to-morrow. If it hasn't turned up by the time I come home after work I'll step over to the Fairweathers and ask Jessie to lend you a hand."

At this point the Dutch clock struck ten, and presently mother and son retired for the night.

The window of Will's room overlooked the river, on whose surface the old October moon shone with a chilly glitter.

As Will stood a moment gazing out upon the landscape he saw what he thought to be a small boat, with a single occupant, moving cautiously up the river.

"Gee!" he said. "Rather a cold night to be on the water. I wonder who it is?"

The boat approached the Somers landing place, the occupant fastened a line to one of the spile-heads and jumped ashore.

Then he began to slouch along beside the fence that divided the Somers property from that of the Fairweathers.

"Who the dickens is he, and what is he up to?" Will asked himself as the figure cautiously drew near to the house.

"I don't like his looks for a cent," commented the boy, as the intruder paused close to a tall oak tree and a ray of moonlight shone on his face which, though young, looked, even at that distance, hard and uninviting.

The intruder took out a small black pipe, which he deliberately filled with tobacco from a pouch, and then glided behind the tree and sat on the ground, for the glare of a lighted match showed his position.

For fifteen minutes thereafter all that betrayed his presence was the occasional whiff of whitish smoke that floated about the oak as the fellow puffed at his pipe.

Will, now decidedly interested in the stranger's movements, felt no desire to go to bed.

"I'd give something to know what he means by sitting out there under our oak tree on a cold night like this. He doesn't appear to be any too warmly dressed, either. Something evidently is in the wind. Does he propose to try and break into our house, or in to the Fairweather's, a little later on? I fancy he'll get an unexpected and warm reception if he tries it."

At this stage of his reflections the intruder suddenly reappeared around the tree and began a critical survey of the Somers premises.

Then he deliberately walked over to a small tool-house, stocked with implements formerly used by Mr. Somers when he was alive, and which since his death had not been touched. He tried the door.

It was found to be locked, of course.

After considering a moment the fellow hauled a tall chopping block up against the side of the shed, mounted it, and pushed in the only window the building had.

Then he climbed into the opening and disappeared inside.

"I guess it's time for me to interfere," said Will resolutely. "I don't believe he's gone in there to sleep, and I'm not going to have any of my father's things stolen if I can help it."

So, taking his shoes in his hands so as not to awaken his mother, he crept down to the kitchen, which overlooked the tool-house.

"I'll wait here and see what transpires," said the boy, putting on his shoes, so as to be in readiness to pop out suddenly into the yard.

Will was an uncommonly strong and fearless lad, with the most unbounded confidence in his own powers.

That the intruder might carry a concealed weapon did not occur to him at the moment.

Will waited a good quarter of an hour before they were any further developments.

Then the visitor's head reappeared at the window, and with remarkable agility he swung himself through the opening and dropped to the ground.

Will saw the handles of several short tools protruding from his side pockets.

"That settles it. I've got to stop him. Now, how in the name of wonder did he know that was a tool-house? One would think he was familiar with our place, yet so far as I can judge, he seems to be a perfect stranger in this locality."

As the stranger started off for the open gate Will softly opened the kitchen door and attempted to cut him off from the street.

His sudden appearance on the scene startled the intruder for a moment, and he stood stock still.

Each had a plain view of the other in the moonlight.

"Will Somers!" ejaculated the young fellow, beginning to back away.

His voice had such a familiar ring that the boy stopped and regarded him keenly.

The closer view and the bright moonshine did the rest.

"Ed Rickson!" Will exclaimed in astonishment. "You back?"

"Well, what of it?" replied the fellow with a snarl. "Ain't this where I live when I'm at home?"

"What were you doing in our tool-house just now?" demanded the boy aggressively. "I didn't think you were a thief, Ed Rickson. Your father wouldn't like to know what you've been up to."

"My father!"

He had reached the fence by this time and laid one hand on it.

The two words were uttered with a sneering intonation not pleasant to hear.

"Yes, your father," repeated Will, greatly surprised at young Rickson's manner.

"Good-night!" and with a mocking laugh Ed Rickson vaulted the paling and darted off down the deserted street at a high rate of speed.

It was useless for Will to think of following him; indeed, since he had recognized Ed Rickson he had no great desire to do so.

After watching his dwindling figure disappear in the gloom, Will went back to the tool-house, mounted the block, struck a match, and looked inside.

He saw that the lid of one of the chests had been forced open.

"I'll investigate closer in the morning and see what you've taken, Ed Rickson," he said, as he closed the window and removed the chopping block.

Fifteen minutes later he was in bed, wondering over the strange return to Northport of the black sheep of the Rickson family, and trying to surmise what he was up to at that unseasonable hour of the night.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH TESSIE RICKSON SPRINGS A TRAP ON JESSIE FAIRWEATHER, AND HOW IT WORKED.

The operating room of the Northport cotton mills was in full swing.

At least a hundred busy girls were employed in that room, and the majority of them had their eyes cocked up at the big clock which hung within sight of all, for the long hand pointed to a minute to twelve.

Way down in the engine-room, at the corner of the big yard, Will Somers was also watching a smaller timepiece, while one of his hands was raised, his fingers gripping the cord that would in another moment send forth the welcome blast releasing every one of the mill's employees from work for one hour.

At that interesting moment Tessie Rickson, who had been to the dressing-room, rushed up to one of the fore-women in a state of great excitement.

"Oh, Miss McBoyle, somebody has taken my pocket-book!" she said hysterically.

"What's that?" asked the forewoman sharply.

She was a stout, red-faced woman, whom none of the girls liked, because she was such a crank.

Jessie Fairweather, in particular, was a target for Miss Boyle's ill temper, because she took very little notice of the woman's outbursts, and also because she was so pretty and such a general favorite.

"Somebody has taken my pocketbook," repeated Tessie, in a voice sufficiently loud to attract attention.

"Nonsense!" snapped Miss McBoyle.

"It's really so!" persisted the red-haired girl, with a great show of earnestness.

"You mislaid it somewhere."

"No, I didn't, Miss McBoyle; I know I left it in the pocket of my jacket in the dressing-room."

"Well, what do you expect me to do about it?" grunted the forewoman.

"I wish you'd come in and help me find it."

"The idea! Don't you think I've something else to do, Miss Rickson?"

"Oh, dear! I don't know what I shall do!" piped Tessie tearfully.

At that moment off went the whistle, and the girls throughout the room began to flock at once toward the dressing-rooms.

"Well, come along," said Miss McBoyle rather ungraciously.

"Somebody must have taken it out of my pocket," insinuated Tessie.

"I don't believe it," replied the forewoman.

"Well, I wouldn't trust that Fairweather girl as she is such a favorite," said Tessie vindictively.

At this Miss McBoyle cocked up her ears.

"What makes you think she might do such a thing?"

"Oh, I've my reasons," said Miss Rickson, tossing her head disdainfully.

"Well, I must say I don't fancy her myself," sniffed the forewoman.

Tessie knew that, and began to throw out insinuations against the fair Jessie.

"I'd search her dress if I was you," said Miss Rickson eagerly.

For reasons of her own, the forewoman was ready to adopt this unfair plan, for she was only too eager to humiliate the belle of the factory.

So she snatched down the girl's walking dress from the hook just as its owner entered the room with a bevy of her friends.

"Why, Miss McBoyle, that's my dress," protested Jessie, as the woman thrust her coarse red hand into the pocket of the dress, much to Tessie's delight.

"I believe it is," snapped the forewoman as she brought a small pocketbook to the light.

"There! I told you she took it!" screamed Tessie. "That's my pocketbook."

"What have you got to say to this, Miss Fairweather?" asked Miss McBoyle, with a triumphant ring to her voice.

"Are you in the habit of taking things that don't belong to you?"

"I don't understand, Miss McBoyle," replied Jessie with dignity.

"Indeed! Perhaps you can explain how Miss Rickson's pocketbook happened to be in the pocket of your dress?"

The other girls crowding around stared in astonishment.

"I haven't the slightest idea how such a thing occurred, unless Miss Rickson put it there herself by mistake."

"The idea!" sniffed Tessie, with a scornful glance at her intended victim.

"She accuses you of stealing it from her," said the forewoman severely.

"Accuses me—of—stealing her pocketbook!" gasped Jessie, flushing with mortification at such a charge.

"Yes, miss. And as the article has been found in your possession I shall have to inform the superintendent," said Miss McBoyle in a tone of satisfaction. "I had no idea we had a thief in the mill."

"Miss McBoyle, how dare you insinuate such a thing!" cried Jessie, tears of indignation coming into her pretty eyes.

"It's a shame!", chorused the other girls. "Jessie wouldn't do such a thing."

"You're mad because you've been caught in the act," sneered the forewoman. "I always thought you were a sly thing, with your innocent airs and prudish ways. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Girls, do you believe me capable of such a thing?" cried Jessie, appealing with burning cheeks and flashing eyes to her working mates.

"No!" they shouted with one accord.

"How can you accuse Jessie of taking your property, Tessie Rickson?" cried one spirited girl, putting her arm around Jessie Fairweather.

"Well, it was found on her, all right," said Tessie, spitefully.

"I believe you put it there yourself, just to get her into trouble," cried another girl, coming to Jessie's aid.

"The idea!" retorted Tessie, angrily. "You can believe what you like, Clara Parks, but I've my own opinion. It isn't the first thing I've missed. Some people put on a lot of airs, when they ain't no better than—"

"Than what, Tessie Rickson?" said Jessie, walking up to her accuser and looking her squarely in the eye.

"You needn't try to intimidate me, Miss Makebelieve," replied Tessie scornfully. "You may softsolder the rest of the girls, but you can't draw the wool over my eyes. You are a deceitful thing! I know you talk about me behind my back. Say I have carotty hair, that my mouth is large enough to swallow snowballs, and I'm all bones. I hate you—there!"

And Miss Rickson, with tears of rage in her green eyes, marched out of the room, leaving Jessie almost paralyzed with pained astonishment.

Miss McBoyle had in the meanwhile gone down to the superintendent's office to register the charge of attempted theft against Miss Fairweather.

"What must you girls think of me?" exclaimed Jessie, breaking down at last under the strain of the terrible position in which she was placed.

"I know what I think!" cried one of her devoted adherents. "You're the best and sweetest girl I ever knew," and the speaker kissed Jessie tenderly.

"It's a shame!" said Miss Parks indignantly.

"It's more than that," cried a little brunette, "it's an outrage. "I move we have nothing more to do with Tessie Rickson."

"I say so, too!" cried another girl.

"And I!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

The whole bunch agreed.

"We'll fix her, the hateful thing!" cried Miss Parks. "It's a put-up job of her own. As for Miss Vinegary McBoyle, she only wanted an excuse to jump on Jessie. She is forever picking at her, anyway. Now don't cry, dear. We're all your friends, and we're just going to stand by you right up to the handle, as my brother calls it, aren't we, girls?"

"Yes," in chorus.

"You're very kind, all of you!" sobbed Jessie. "But you don't know how mortified I feel at being called a thief. Just as if I could take the value of a pin from any one. Oh, dear, it's terrible!"

"If I was you I would go right straight to the superintendent and demand justice," cried Miss Parks.

"And we'll all go with you!" exclaimed the rest.

And the result of it was that Jessie did march straight down to the superintendent's office and stated the case.

And every one of her friends insisted on being heard in her behalf.

Mr. Harper smiled good-naturedly.

"Miss McBoyle made a sort of charge against you, Miss Fairweather, but I laughed her down. Why, bless you,

young lady, I'd as soon think one of my own daughters guilty of such a thing as you. There! Don't cry, please. I take no stock in it at all. It is simply ridiculous. Go home, all of you, to your dinners, and I'll allow you half an hour extra to-day, under the circumstances, as you've lost that much time over this silly affair."

And Miss Rickson, when she returned to work that afternoon, found, to her great disgust and mortification, that not a girl in the room would notice her.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR THE SAKE OF HER ENEMY.

A great deal of sympathy was expressed by the girls of the Northport cotton mills for Jessie Fairweather that afternoon, while at the same time, if Miss McBoyle and Tessie Rickson could have heard all the remarks passed upon their conduct over the pocketbook affair, they would not have been a bit pleased.

News of that nature is bound to spread, and it was not long before the intelligence reached the engine-room.

"Now, what do you think of that?" cried Will Somers, after one of the "kids" of the establishment had told him all about the dressing-room trouble.

The remark was made to Mr. Davis, the engineer, who, pipe in mouth, had been quietly listening to the story.

"A jealous girl is capable of doing a great deal of mischief," said the engineer sagely.

"Well, I should say so. But only a very spiteful, reckless girl would put up such a mean job as that," said Will angrily.

Mr. Davis nodded.

"Of course there isn't any doubt but she was at the bottom of the scheme," went on Will, "though the fact hasn't actually been shown. But from the way Billy says the girls are handing it out to Miss Rickson this afternoon it's evident that they all believe she's guilty of the plot. And wouldn't you think that a woman like Miss McBoyle would easily have seen through such a thin device?"

Whatever the engineer thought on the subject, he did not express it in words, but he made a pretty shrewd guess at the forewoman's motives.

"This latest contrivance of yours which I attached to the boiler yesterday afternoon seems to be working all right," said Mr. Davis.

"Is that a fact, sir?" answered Will, with sparkling eyes.

The engineer nodded.

"You've got some good ideas in that brain of yours, young man," continued Mr. Davis approvingly. "I'm satisfied you could pass examination for a stationary engineer's license."

"Thank you for your good opinion, Mr. Davis. I am sure I owe a large part of my proficiency to your instruction and encouragement," replied Will, gratefully.

"That may be," admitted the engineer; "but if it was not in you my endeavors would have been wasted. There is a heap of satisfaction in helping a young fellow along when you see he's trying his best to take advantage of

his opportunities. All boys are not as clever as you are. Too many of them are ambitious to do great things for which they have no ability, but are not inclined to do little things for which they alone are capable. Now, for instance—"

That, however, was as far as the engineer got on this occasion, for at that instant there came to their ears a shrill scream from the direction of the factory building.

"Something's wrong!" exclaimed Will, springing to the open doorway.

Yes, something was wrong!

The third-story windows of the operating room were filled with screaming girls, above whose heads a thin film of smoke was sifting out on the afternoon air.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" wailed the girls from point to point.

"Great Scott!" shouted Will back to the engineer as he dashed out of the doorway. "I believe the factory is on fire!"

All the men employees working about the yard started for the imperilled building, into the main entrance of which Superintendent Harper, hatless and excited, had just disappeared.

Two or three girls came bursting out from the employees' entrance, falling faint upon one another in a heap, and were speedily dragged up and carried several yards away by some of the men.

Then a crowd of workers from the ground and second floors came rushing out.

On the far side of the factory, that which overlooked the street, Will saw a huge volume of dark smoke, mingled with spurts of flame, rising above the level of the roof.

"The place is on fire, sure enough!" he cried as he hurried forward. "But why in creation don't the girls chase themselves down the main stairway?"

The reason for this was apparent when the boy entered the building and had mounted to the second floor.

The stairs leading to the small corridor on the next floor, and which communicated with the main fire-escape on the front of the building, was a mass of flames.

The upper passage was choked by a dense smoke, that blocked any attempt to reach the fire-escape in question.

All retreat from the operating room by the main avenues of escape was cut off.

"Great Caesar!" exclaimed Will, aghast at the peril which menaced the employees on the upper floor. "The girls will have to hustle down the emergency iron stairways at the ends of the building."

"Where's the hose?" hoarsely shouted Mr. Harper at the foot of the burning stairs.

"We're bringing one up, sir!" replied a burly yardman from below, who, with the help of a companion, was dragging a length of fire hose which had just been attached to the hydrant outside the back door.

Will saw he could be of no use where he was, and anxious for the safety of the girls, and that of Jessie Fairweather in particular, he ran back to the yard in time to see a long ladder planted against the wall of the factory,

beneath one of the windows that was crowded with screaming girls.

The men were shouting to the girls to go to the ends of the building and come down by the iron stairs, but so rattled were the poor things that only a few were seen to take advantage of these exits.

"Let me go up the ladder!" and Will started at once to ascend, with the view of calming the panic that was raging on the top floor.

The ladder was too short to reach the level of the window, but by carefully balancing himself on the topmost rung Will grasped the window sill and scrambled into the long operating room, forcing back a dozen girls who blocked the way.

"Why don't you go to the end of the room?" cried the boy to the terrified young women. "You can all get down by the iron stairways if you only go about it right."

But it was a difficult matter to bring order out of the pandemonium which now existed on the top floor.

And small wonder that it was so, for the place was growing hazy with smoke, and the sinister roar of the flames in the corridor outside was terrifying to the girls, who could see the fire through the cracks in the blazing partition.

Will began forcing the groups of employees toward the other end of the building, never for a moment ceasing to shout to them how they could get out, until at last he got the tide set in both directions; and the girls then began to stream down the iron stairways, encouraged by workmen on the several landings and on the ground below.

By this time a stream of water was turned on the fire, but the blaze had got too much headway to be subdued by one line of hose.

However, help was coming from the outside.

The town fire department, three engine companies, were now rushing to the scene as fast as the horses could bring them.

Will, working like a beaver for the safety of the girls, had not recognized Jessie among the crowd, which had by this time thinned down to a dozen or two, waiting their chance in fear and trembling to get on to the iron stairs.

"She must have got out all right," he thought thankfully, as he saw the last of the girls passing through the end windows of the smoky room. "Gee! It's getting pretty hot up here now, all right. The fire has got hold of the dressing-room, I see. The girls will lose all their clothes; but better that than their lives. Time for me to go, I guess."

At this moment one of the sides of the partition separating the operating room from the corridor fell in with a crash, and Will had a clear view of the blazing stairway beyond.

It was like looking into a fiery furnace.

The flames were in full control of the end of the dressing-room on the other side.

As he started for one of the iron stairways himself, tears in his eyes from the effects of the smoke, and his throat parched and smarting from the same cause, he sud-

denly stopped short within a few yards of the blazing dressing-room.

The hurried glance he had cast in that direction showed him a human hand and part of an arm thrust through the half open doorway.

"Great heavens!" he cried. "Some poor girl has fainted in there. I must save her at any cost!"

Dropping on his knees to escape the stifling air as much as possible, he crawled rapidly over to the door of the dressing-room.

Pushing the door wide open, he saw in the red glare of the blaze that now had full possession of the room two insensible girls, one of whom, who seemed to have been in the act of dragging her companion away from peril when she herself had been overcome, he recognized, with a thrill of horrified surprise, as Jessie Fairweather.

The other was Jessie's bitter enemy, Tessie Rickson.

Will took in the situation at a glance.

"You're a noble girl, Jessie," he murmured, as he seized hold of her and released the grip she had on Tessie; "but that I saw you by the merest accident, you would have lost your life for the sake of the girl who tried to ruin you this morning."

He dragged her several yards away and then returned for Tessie, the hem of whose skirt was now on fire.

He beat out the fire and carried her forward a short distance toward safety.

Alternately he worked the senseless girls toward the end of the long room, with the flames, now in control of the floor, reaching out hungrily after him.

Staggering along, gasping for breath and dizzy from the heat, he slowly drew them nearer to the opening connecting with the fire-escape.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE NAME OF THE LAW.

A big crowd had gathered outside in the street by this time.

The engines were getting into position, and the firemen were bringing up their hose in readiness to turn a number of streams on the blazing factory, the upper floor of which, on the dressing-room side, was rapidly being gutted by the flames.

The fire now having a good headway, it was playing high jinks with that end of the building.

Everybody was believed to have got out of the danger zone, and all efforts were centered on saving as much of the factory as possible.

Great, then, was the astonishment of the crowd that had a clear view of that end of the building when a human figure stumbled out on to the platform of the narrow fire-escape stairs.

Then he seemed to pull himself together, but to everybody's surprise, instead of running down the escape, he dashed back into the burning floor.

"He's mad!" cried a spectator.

"Plum crazy!" said another.

"Who is he?" asked a third.

No one knew at the time, for no one had clearly seen his face.

Two of the firemen started up the fire-escape.

Before they reached the platform Will again appeared at the opening, this time with a burden in his arms.

"Hurrah!" shrieked the mob, in a paroxysm of enthusiasm.

Propping the girl, who was Jessie Fairweather, against the railing, Will vanished into the smoke once more.

The crowd seemed to realize what was meant.

"There's more inside," was passed from mouth to mouth, and all grew quiet with apprehension.

"There he is!" cried one eagerly, pointing at the opening, which was now more obscure than ever from the smoke.

Another simultaneous yell went up from the crowd, as Will staggered forth, bearing Tessie Rickson in his arms.

By that time the firemen had reached the upper landing. One of them picked up Miss Fairweather, while the other relieved Will of Tessie Rickson, and down the ladder they went, followed by the boy, whose face and hands were black from the stains of smoke, and blistered by the heat.

The surging mob shouted its approval and experienced a great feeling of relief.

While the superintendent was wringing Will by one hand, the vice-president of the company, who had arrived on the ground, was shaking him by the other.

And both were telling him what a brave young fellow he was.

At the same time a crowd of employees of both sexes gathered around the group.

"It's Will Somers!" cried those in a position to see, and his name was passed about from one to another until everybody in the yard knew what the boy had accomplished.

"Isn't he grand!" exclaimed one girl.

"Why, he's a real hero!" said another.

"He saved Jessie Fairweather!"

"And that Rickson girl, too!"

"Just look at his face, the poor fellow!"

Such was the tenor of the remarks in the crowd around Will, who finally made a dive through his admirers and made his way to the engine-room, at the door of which stood the engineer.

In the meantime Jessie Fairweather and Tessie Rickson had been taken in hand by sympathizing friends and brought to their senses.

At first Tessie hardly knew whether she was glad or sorry to find herself alive.

This may seem like an odd statement to make, but then Tessie had her reasons.

In the first place, she had been the cause of the fire.

She had been enraged by the way the girls had treated her that afternoon, for all of them suspected that she was at the bottom of the pocketbook affair, and for the purpose of getting square she had deliberately gone into the dressing-room and set fire to several of the dresses in one corner of the room.

In her anger she did not reflect that she was endanger-

ing the building, her idea being to destroy the clothes of those girls who had been particularly conspicuous in their hostile attitude toward her.

But she had unwittingly selected a particularly inflammable part of the room, a place where the partition leading against the stairs had been oil-soaked with drippings from a hanger that supported one of the cross shafts.

Consequently the fire spread to the landing outside with great rapidity.

When the alarm was given she ran to the dressing-room to save her own clothes, but was overcome with terror and heat just as Jessie appeared on the scene, and her last recollections were of the brave and unselfish efforts the girl she had injured was making to save her from a fate she was powerless to escape.

She hated to think she actually owed her life to Jessie Fairweather.

When the two girls learned their escape was due to gallant Will Somers they expressed themselves in different ways, characteristic of their dispositions.

Jessie had little to say, while deeply grateful to Will, but Tessie raved over the affair, because it was so like the hero and heroine in the story papers she was accustomed to read.

While the Northport fire department was doing its best to get the flames under control Will Somers interviewed a bucket of water and a bar of castile soap, which, with the assistance of a crash towel, soon made him presentable again.

Many admiring friends gathered at the engine-room to congratulate him personally.

"Oh, come now!" he remonstrated good-naturedly. "Let up on a fellow, won't you? I didn't do such an awful lot, when you come to look it in the face. I simply found the girls lying at the door of the dressing-room, and you don't suppose any one but a savage without a grain of feeling would have left them there to perish, do you? Any one of you fellows would have done exactly as I did, under the circumstances, so what's the use of making all this fuss about it? I'm glad I got them out, so that's all there is to it."

"Oh, I don't know," remarked a big operator who worked on the ground floor; "many boys, or men, for that matter, would have thought of number one first of all, and not have taken the chances you did. At any rate, you're all right, Will."

"Bet your life he is!" said another husky fellow admiringly.

"You're the real article, young man," spoke up one of the foremen. "Every day I hear people blow about what they can do or have done, but I like to talk to a party who I know has done something worth while and isn't blowing off about it afterward."

"You hit the nail on the head that time, Buckley," said another employee.

"There's one thing certain," grinned a fifth, "you've got all the girls dead to rights this trip. They'll rave over you for a month."

"Say, don't!" objected Will, with a laugh. "I've only got one-size hats to my name, and I don't want you fellows to swell my head up so I can't wear them."

"No fear of that," said the foreman. "You aren't built that way."

"Is Will Somers here?" asked a voice on the outside at this juncture.

"Sure he is," somebody was heard to say. "What do you want with him, officer? He hain't been stealing some girl's heart, has he?" with a loud guffaw.

As all hands looked toward the doorway the head constable of Northport entered the engine-room.

"How do you do, Will Somers. I am sorry to say my errand is an unpleasant one; but I have to do my duty. I have a warrant for your arrest."

This unexpected announcement created a profound sensation among those present.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH SQUIRE JARVIS FAILS TO MAKE A CASE AGAINST WILL SOMERS.

"What do you mean, Mr. Brady?" gasped Will Somers in the greatest astonishment.

"I am sorry my duty obliges me to make you my prisoner; but I don't see any way out of it. I'll have to conduct you before Justice Benson."

"But I haven't done anything for which I should be arrested," remonstrated Will.

"I hope you haven't," replied the constable. "It is quite possible some mistake has been made, in which case you will be immediately released."

"There certainly is a mistake," said the boy stoutly.

"You don't look at all like a guilty boy," said the constable, with a smile.

"I should think not. All right; I'm ready to face the music."

"What's the charge, Mr. Brady?" asked Mr. Davis, the engineer.

"I regret to say it's a very serious one," replied the officer soberly.

"You don't mean to say this boy is accused of murdering somebody, do you?" said the engineer, with a contemptuous laugh.

"Hardly as bad as that," answered the officer, who saw that, officially, he was not favorably regarded by Will's friends.

"Well, what am I charged with?" asked the boy.

"Burglary!"

I believe you might have knocked Will, and the whole crowd, for that matter, down with a feather at that moment.

Burglary!

Why, it was ridiculous.

"Who made such a preposterous charge against this boy?" demanded Mr. Davis.

"Squire Jarvis."

That was the second surprise, but it was evidently a serious one.

Surely the magnate of Northport would not make such an accusation without some ground to base it on.

No one had heard that a burglary had been committed on the Jarvis premises.

But suppose such had been the case, in what way was Will Somers, one of the brightest and most respected lads in town, connected with it?

That was the question each one in the engine-room asked himself as he looked at Will's honest face and then at the officer.

"I suppose you have the warrant with you?" asked Mr. Davis.

"I have," answered the constable. "Do you wish to see it?"

"Yes."

Constable Brady produced it, and the engineer found it was made out in proper form.

"I shall be ready to go along with you as soon as I get out of my working clothes," said Will; "but I guess the Squire will find he has made a serious blunder in bringing this charge against me."

"Well, I hope you will get out of it all right. It's a pleasure for me to come after you in my official capacity. Your father was a good friend of mine, and this job is not at all to my liking."

"I have no fault to find with you, Constable Brady," said the boy, as he slipped off his overalls.

In a few moments he was ready to go with the officer.

So, while the factory fire, which was now under control, held the attention of almost everybody in the vicinity, Will Somers and Constable Brady left the yard by a back gate and proceeded to the courthouse, where the officer said the justice was waiting to hold a sort of informal examination of the charge.

Will was conducted to Justice Benson's office and directed to take a seat.

Besides Mr. Benson, the most prominent person in the room was Squire Jarvis, who gave the prisoner a severe, uncompromising look.

The gardener of the Jarvis establishment was also present.

"Will Somers, I am sorry to have you brought before me on a criminal charge, especially one so serious as the warrant indicates; but I have no doubt you will be able to clear yourself, at least I trust so," and Justice Benson looked kindly at the manly young fellow, whom he had known from his infancy, and who did not at all look like a boy capable of committing an unworthy action.

Squire Jarvis sniffed at Mr. Benson's encouraging view of the situation, and thumped the floor with his gold-headed cane, as though to express his disapprobation.

"I want you to understand, Master Somers, that this examination is entirely informal," continued the justice, "and that you are not compelled to say a word unless you choose to do so. But if you do say anything, I warn you that you are not obliged to commit yourself, and that whatever you say may be used against you."

"If he wants to confess he had better do so now," said the magnate impatiently.

"You are rather hasty, Squire Jarvis. The boy has not yet been informed in detail of the charge against him."

"Pooh! He knows about it better than any of us," sneered the nabob, casting a black look at Will.

"Squire Jarvis, that remark is hardly a fair one," objected the justice, who was clearly favorably disposed toward the prisoner.

"Pooh!" and the lawyer thumped the floor once more.

"Listen to me, Master Somers," said Justice Benson. "Between the hours of eleven last night and six this morning, Squire Jarvis' office, an extension of his residence, was forcibly entered, his desk pried open, and several papers, including a ten dollar bill, were abstracted. You are charged with the crime. Do you wish to make any statement?"

"I wish to say that I know nothing whatever about the matter. This is the first I have heard of it. I was in bed and asleep between the hours mentioned."

This general denial of the charge was received by the Squire and his son, who was also present, with sneering if he shrewd.

"Then," remarked the justice, "if this case ever comes up in court you ought to be able to prove an alibi."

"I think the prisoner would find it a rather difficult matter to prove to the satisfaction of a judge and jury that he was in bed every moment of the time within which it was possible for him to commit this crime," said the Squire, acidly.

"You seem to be greatly prejudiced against this boy," observed Justice Benson.

"Huh!" snorted the nabob, moving about in his chair.

Mr. Benson took up a hammer and a cold chisel which had been lying on his desk, and asked the constable to hand them to Will.

"Have you ever seen those implements before?" he inquired.

The boy looked them over and then answered promptly:

"Yes, sir; they belonged to my father, for his name is upon them."

"Can you assign any reason for their having been found this morning on the floor of Squire Jarvis' office?"

"The only explanation I can offer is this: They were abstracted from our tool-house last night about eleven o'clock by Ed Rickson——"

"Who?" demanded Squire Jarvis, jumping to his feet.

"Ed Rickson."

"What tomfoolery is this? He hasn't been in this neighborhood this two years back," snorted the nabob angrily.

"I know that," answered Will calmly, "but the fact that I saw him enter our tool-house last night through the window, and leave with something in his pockets, shows that he has returned."

"I don't believe any such rot," said the great man rudely.

"Softly, Squire Jarvis. You should not attack the lad's veracity in this way. He is entitled to make whatever ex-

planation he sees fit, and it is quite possible that he speaks the truth. Go on, Master Somers."

"I tried to head him off, but he jumped the fence and got away."

"If Ed Rickson had come back to town I fancy I should have heard of it," said the magnate with an incredulous smile, "for I was speaking to Mr. Rickson at noon to-day, and he made no mention of the circumstance."

"You cannot be ignorant of the fact that Edward Rickson did not bear a very good reputation while he lived in Northport," said Justice Benson, meaningly. "If we accept Master Somers' statement of his encounter with that young man last night, it certainly casts a shade of suspicion in a direction it might be well to follow up. If Edward Rickson did enter the Somers tool-house, as the accused asserts, and I presume he is willing to swear to it in court," and the magistrate glanced inquiringly at Will.

"Yes, sir," answered the boy promptly.

"Then," continued the justice, "he must have had some object in doing so. Had the object been a worthy one, it seems to me the owner of the tool-house would have been consulted. As the tools found in your office this morning have been identified by the accused as the property of his family, and as it has not been shown that Master Somers carried them there himself, why the inference——"

"I beg to say that we are not dealing with inferences," said the Squire stiffly.

"Can you prove that the accused entered your office with these tools?" asked Justice Benson rather sharply.

"If I could there would be no necessity for this rigmarole," replied the Squire, a bit disconcerted. "But I can show with sufficient clearness that this Somers boy had a well defined object in breaking into my place and rifling my desk."

"From which I presume you draw an inference of his guilt," said the justice, with a smile, laying stress on the word inference, much to the nabob's annoyance.

"I believe it will establish a strong presumption in that direction," persisted the great man.

"I will hear what you have to say, Squire Jarvis," said Justice Benson quietly.

"The only thing of importance taken from my desk," proceeded the nabob, punctuating his sentences with a downward movement of his extended index finger, "was a certain paper, or, to be more explicit, a note of hand deposited with me yesterday by Mr. Job Rickson for collection. This paper would not be of the slightest use or value to Ed Rickson, assuming for the sake of illustration that it was he who broke into my office; but, sir, its destruction would be of the greatest importance to the pecuniary interests of the Somers family, inasmuch as it represents an unsettled claim against their property."

"Mr. Benson," interrupted Will, springing to his feet, "I deny Squire Jarvis' statement that the note to which he refers represents an unsettled claim against my mother. The note was paid by my father before his death, and the attempt now made by Mr. Rickson, through Squire Jarvis, to collect it over again is a rank swindle."

"Master Somers," said the justice mildly, "you must not interrupt Squire Jarvis while he is speaking. Whatever you have to say about this matter I will hear after the Squire has finished."

"The note in question," continued the magnate, casting a supercilious glance at the boy, "is a promissory one, for the sum of three hundred dollars, drawn in favor of Job Rickson, and signed by Nathaniel Somers. Together with unpaid interest to date it represents a perfectly legal claim against the drawer's estate of four hundred and twenty-five dollars. This is the vital point I wish to impress upon your attention, Mr. Benson. The other papers, as well as the ten dollar bill, I believe were merely taken as a blind. It is fortunate that the thief, owing to the hurry of the moment, perfectly natural to one unaccustomed to the commission of crime, forgot to take away the implements he brought with him to accomplish his object."

"I believe you have a safe in your office, Squire Jarvis?" said the justice.

"I have."

"I should think, then, that would have been the proper place for you to have kept that note."

"I can explain why I did not have it in the safe last night," said the lawyer pompously. "I called with that note on Mrs. Somers last evening about eight o'clock for the purpose of arranging with her as to its payment."

"And mother contested it on the ground that it had already been paid once, a fact we could prove only that the receipt has been mislaid or lost," broke in Will impetuously.

"Go on, Squire Jarvis," said Mr. Benson, overlooking the interruption.

"It was rather late when I returned home, and not caring to take the trouble to unlock my safe, I opened my desk and slipped it into one of the pigeon-holes. I naturally had no suspicion that any one was likely to break into my office during the night—certainly no one interested in that particular bit of paper. It seems I was mistaken," concluded the lawyer, grimly, as he sat down again.

"That is all you have to say, Squire?"

"That is all; I think it is conclusive," gazing around with a satisfied expression, "when taken in connection with the testimony of my gardener, whom I will now bring forward."

Jobbings, the gardener, testified to the following facts: That he had found the outside door of the Squire's office ajar that morning at six o'clock, and on examination found that it had clearly been broken in by a cold chisel, or similar instrument; that he entered the office, and found evidence that the Squire's desk had also been tampered with; that he had found the hammer and cold chisel, which he now identified as the articles in question, on the carpet beside the justice's desk; that he immediately aroused his employer and notified him of the circumstances.

"Have you anything further to say, Master Somers?" asked the justice, gazing at the boy, whose honest face and straightforward manner favorably impressed him.

"No, sir," replied Will fearlessly.

"I should think not," said Squire Jarvis, offensively,

glaring at the lad. "I presume you will permit the prisoner to stand trial—"

"I am afraid," said Justice Benson, interrupting him, "that the evidence is not sufficient to warrant holding the boy."

"Sir!" exclaimed the Squire, in some astonishment.

"I am surprised that you, a lawyer, in view of the lack of evidence, even of a circumstantial nature, should insist on such a course, which, in the event that you afterward failed to make out a true case, would make you liable to be proceeded against in a civil suit for damages. Will Somers, you are discharged."

"Thank you, Mr. Benson," and putting on his hat, he walked out of the justice's office a very happy boy.

CHAPTER XI.

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS ABOUT WILL SOMERS' GAME OF CHANCE.

When Will Somers got back to the factory that afternoon he found the fire had been put out and the engines gone.

A solitary representative of the fire department stood on guard at the main entrance, and a few curios ^{vigil} tators hung about the neighborhood gazing up at the ruin of the third story.

Superintendent Harper and an insurance adjuster were figuring out the loss in the office.

All the employees, with the exception of the engineer and a few of the yardmen, had departed.

"Hello, Bill!" exclaimed Mr. Davis when the boy walked into the engine-room. "Back again, eh? Got out of your scrape, all right?"

"Yes, sir," answered Will cheerily.

"That's good. What was it all about, anyway?"

Will told him the whole story.

"The Squire seems to have it in for you," commented the engineer.

"I don't seem to be an especial favorite of his, that's a fact," replied the boy with a cheerful grin.

"That's right; but I wouldn't let that fact worry you any."

"I don't mean that it shall."

"Ed Rickson is at the bottom of that affair," said Mr. Davis, nodding his head sagely.

"He always was a hard nut," said Mr. Davis; "but I never knew before that he was a thief. His two years' absence has not reformed him, I see. I'm afraid it has only developed his criminal instincts."

"His father's reputation isn't anything to brag about. This swindle he is trying to work on my mother only serves to confirm my opinion of the man. The idea of him keeping that note all these years in the background, and then ringing it in on us at the last minute on the chance that we couldn't produce the receipt he gave to father for the money! That shows you what kind of a man he is," said the boy indignantly.

"Squire Jarvis can't but have some suspicion of the truth. It doesn't speak well for him to support a fraud."

"Mr. Rickson has probably promised him a large commission to collect the note."

"Such a proposal as that should be enough to arouse any lawyer's doubts, especially after your mother affirmed the note had already been paid, and Mr. Rickson had allowed it to run so many years after maturity without presenting it for payment."

"That's right. It has all the earmarks of a skin on the face of it."

"Now that the note has disappeared, it is possible you may never hear from it again," suggested the engineer encouragingly.

"I don't know about that," said Will doubtfully. "Ed Rickson may return it to his father, as it is of value to him. He could do that by mail, if he's afraid to show himself at his home. What gets me is why he entered the Squire's office at all. He couldn't expect to get any money without breaking into the safe, and he certainly was not provided with tools for such a purpose. The ten dollar bill he got just happened to be in the desk."

"It would only be wasted time to figure upon what his object was," said the engineer as he relighted his pipe. "He had one, no doubt, and it will probably come to light if he should ever be caught."

"I don't believe Squire Jarvis will make any complaint against him," intimated Will. "His efforts were all directed to fasten the crime on me. Lewis is dead sore on me, too, and I think that's the secret of his father's ill-will."

"Very likely. You might as well go home, Will. It's half-past four, and there's nothing for you to do around here."

"All right. Guess I'll go and take a look at my dam. It's pretty near time I had it repaired."

"Say, young man," said the engineer curiously, "what are you up to, anyway? What are you going to make out of that swamp-plot? You aren't such a fool as to try the same dodge Rickson monkeyed with, are you?"

"What makes you ask?" said Will with a grin.

"Because I'm curious to learn what your little game is. Rickson figured on making a small fortune out of an ice privilege by damming the outlet of the swamp and making a swamp out of the ten acres. The idea was certainly ingenious, but the conformation of the bog knocked his scheme on the head. He was badly disappointed. The next thing I heard was that you, with all your smartness, had paid him twenty-five dollars for a clear title to the place, which, in my opinion, isn't worth a cent."

"I know you said so when I first admitted to you that I had purchased it. But that's where you and I differ."

"We certainly do," replied the engineer positively. "Are you going to fill it in and try to reclaim the land?" with a grin. "Kind of foolish thing to attempt, when people say it hasn't any bottom. Those stones you dumped on the frozen surface last winter are probably coming out in China, or somewhere else, by this time. Better let the place alone and devote your time to engineering, where your talent lies."

"It is possible I may surprise you with that swamp-plot yet, Mr. Davis. I'm working a scheme—a sort of game of chance my brain is playing against the perverseness of nature. You ought to know that a large proportion of success in this world is the outcome of chance, anyway. Rickson was sure he was going to succeed. When he failed he threw the whole thing up in disgust, without investigating the cause that threw him down. I didn't get on to it at first myself, but after a little while I saw through it. Then I began to figure out how the real difficulty might be overcome, just as I have worked my brains to try to produce a successful new damper regulator, or my steam condenser which you have just applied to that boiler—see?"

The engineer nodded and began to look interested.

"I may fail and get the grand laugh," continued Will, though his eyes sparkled with the enthusiasm of the hopeful inventor, "but I am satisfied I am working along correct lines. If I fail this winter the character of the failure will determine whether I shall make another attempt or let the whole matter go by the board. I have thoroughly investigated the quality and consistency of that swamp grass. That was the most important step in the scheme. Once I was satisfied my idea was feasible I went ahead. The chief element of chance in my mind lies in the uncertain course nature may pursue when the water is prevented from escaping."

"You know what occurred the last time this was done."

"Exactly. My scheme is to offset a repetition of that occurrence."

"That's a sensible idea, I'll admit. How do you propose to overcome this difficulty?" asked the engineer, now thoroughly interested.

"That's my secret, Mr. Davis, and I hope you won't feel sore because I prefer to keep you in the dark about it for the present. I've only told one person, and she—"

"Your mother, I suppose," said the engineer.

"No, I haven't explained the matter to my mother, because if I happen to be successful I shall be able to work a very pleasant surprise on her."

"Then, who is the 'she'?" asked Mr. Davis, tantalizingly.

"Oh, it's a girl—"

"I didn't suppose the 'she' was a boy," grinned the engineer.

"I mean she's a particular friend of mine," said Will, flushing to his hair.

"Oh, I see. You mean the prettiest girl in the factory—Jessie Fairweather."

"Well, maybe I do," admitted the boy reluctantly.

"You needn't be ashamed to acknowledge it, Will Somers. She's the brightest girl in Northport, just as you are the smartest boy. If I had the picking out of a girl for you she'd be the first choice. You two are well matched. I hope one of these days to see—"

"Good-night," said Will, hastily. "I'm off."

And the honest old engineer shook with quiet laughter as the boy made a sudden break for the door and disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

REPAIRING THE DAM AT THE MOUTH OF THE SWAMP-LOT.

For the next day or two, while the first and second stories of the factory were being cleaned up and put into shape for the resumption of work in those departments of the building, Will had nothing to do in the engine-room of the Northport cotton mills.

So he took advantage of the opportunity to repair the dam at the swamp-lot.

He did not do this all by himself, but induced a particular friend, named Sam Travis, to give him a helping hand.

They took a number of substantial boards and the necessary tools, and went out to the grawsome spot.

The water was running freely through the opening Will had made after he had completed his self-imposed job of distributing the heavy stones over the frozen surface of the bog.

"So you think you'll have an ice privilege for sale this winter, do you, Will?" said Sam Travis, with an incredulous grin.

"It is possible I may," replied Will tersely.

"Nit!" ejaculated his companion. "Old Rickson tried the experiment last winter, and he got badly roasted. I didn't think you was such a chump as to tackle the same scheme."

"Well, Sam, we can't all be wise in this world, you know," replied Will, with a cheerful laugh. "Perhaps I'm only doing this for fun—just to put in my time, you know."

"Yes, you are like fun," grinned Travis. "I see you doing such a thing. No; you mean business all right. But, hang me if I didn't give you credit for more brains."

"Thanks, Sam, for the compliment," said Will, with the utmost good nature.

"You're welcome."

"Well, now, since you've had your little say, s'pose you get busy. Hand me one of those boards. You stand here and hold your end until I get it straight, and then drive half a dozen of those nails to hold it in place."

"All right, old man; only it's an awful waste of good lumber, nails and energy."

"You will let me be the judge of that, Sam."

"Sure; it's your funeral, not mine."

"If you don't watch where you're putting your feet it may be your funeral, first thing you know," said Will with a grin, as one of Sam's legs slipped and went down into the ooze in a very unpleasant manner.

"Thanks for the warning, old chappie, but I'm not taking a mud bath to-day," snickered Sam, with a rueful look at the bottom of his trousers leg.

"Mud baths, they say, are good for rheumatism."

"Then old Rickson ought to come over here and take a course of treatment."

"He's had all he wants to do with this place, I guess," chuckled Will.

"There'll be others in the sweet by and bye, too," snickered Sam.

"You're a Job's comforter, Sam."

"Think so? You know what the immortal Shakespeare said, don't you?"

"He said, or rather he wrote, a good many bright things. What particular one do you refer to?" asked Will, beginning to nail the end of the plank.

"Suffering jewsharps!" howled Sam, as the business end of the hammer came in sudden contact with his thumb as he started to drive in his second nail.

"That's what he said, was it?" said Will, laughing slyly.

"What you laughing at? Think it funny, don't you?" in an aggrieved tone of voice. "Hang the old thing! Why couldn't it go in straight?" sucking at his injured digit.

"You should have taken aim at the head of the nail, not at your thumb."

"Go bag your head, will you?" growled Sam, with pretended indignation.

"How about what Shakespeare said?" persisted Will, after driving home his last nail.

"That whack knocked it all out of my head," he said as he also finished nailing up his end. "Want another board?"

"Yes."

"All right; here you are," and he pushed over the end of the second board. "Did you hear what happened to Stubbins when he was up to Boston?"

"No; what happened to him?" asked Will curiously.

"He attended an Adams Express Company sale and bid in a box labeled 'dry goods.' What do you s'pose he found in it?"

"A bundle of calico, I guess, or something of that sort."

"Not on your life. He found six bound volumes of the Congressional Record," snickered Sam.

"That isn't so bad for you, Sam; but I wouldn't do it again if I were you."

"Can't help it; runs in our family. Dad and I were talking politics the other night, and I asked him what a political ring was made of, and he said 'steal.' Wouldn't that jar you? Have another board?" grinned Sam.

"Pass it along."

"By the way, Will," said Sam, after a few minutes of silence, "I heard to-day that the Selectmen were going to give you a medal for your heroic conduct at the factory fire in saving the lives of Tessie Rickson and Jessie Fairweather."

"Nonsense!"

"It's a fact, and the only committeeman who voted against the proposition was Squire Jarvis. He still claims it was you broke into his office to get hold of a certain promissory note that he had presented to your mother for payment. Nobody takes any stock in that, though. Constable Brady is on a still hunt after Ed Rickson, all right, and if he catches him I guess there will be something doing."

Will rather objected to a public acknowledgment of his noteworthy action at the factory fire, with the natural modesty of the true hero, but nevertheless he could not but

feel flattered at the honor which his townsmen proposed to confer on him.

Both Jessie and her mother had thanked him with such feeling and earnestness that there could be no doubt of their gratitude for the service he had rendered them.

He felt this expression on their part amply repaid him for whatever risk he had run in Miss Fairweather's behalf.

As for Tessie Rickson, she had made a special visit at the Somers cottage to tell Will and his mother how much she appreciated his conduct on that thrilling occasion when, as she glowingly expressed it, "her life hung on a hair."

Before she tore herself away, with evident reluctance, she had used up all the adjectives of her limited vocabulary.

"Well," said Will, after he and the sturdy Sam had worked for more than an hour on the dam, "I guess that will do. Very little water will get through here now. In a week I shall begin to get some idea how things are going to pan out."

"You mean that in a week you'll begin to discover what a chump you are," grinned his companion.

"All right, have your own way," returned the hopeful young inventor.

"And you really do expect to make a pond here?" said Sam incredulously.

"That's what I hope to accomplish."

"You'll have a pond, all right, but the water will be out of sight."

"That's just where we differ; I'm looking for it to show on top."

"That's what Rickson looked for, but it didn't do him any good. If the water pushed that grass up once it's going to do it again."

"Sure of that, are you?"

"Of course I am; it stands to reason that it will."

"If you wanted to find out the depth of that old dry well in your back yard without going down into it, how would you proceed?"

"That's simple. I'd drop a stone down and count the seconds that elapsed till it struck bottom," said Sam, pleased to display his knowledge of natural philosophy.

"I'd tie a string to the stone and measure the string afterward," said Will. "That shows you we look at the same thing from a different point of view."

"Ha! Any fool could measure a well that way," said Sam contemptuously.

"I've just taken as simple a way to make a pond here, the only difference between the two is that this is a game of chance."

"Oh, you haven't the least chance in the world," replied Sam.

Then they gathered up the tools and left the spot.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH ED RICKSON TURNS UP AGAIN UNDER PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES.

The Bugle and the News, the two weekly papers of Northport, came out that afternoon with a column account

of the factory fire, and the Bugle, in particular, praised Will Somers' heroism to the top notch.

Both papers also published notices of the project afoot to present the boy with a medal as a mark of the town's appreciation, though the matter in the Times was dismissed with a three-line item in the locals.

In addition, each paper printed a report of Will's arrest and examination before Justice Benson, on the charge of breaking into Squire Jarvis' office and stealing certain papers from his desk.

The Bugle's story was brief and the charge commented on as baseless.

On the other hand, the Times, the editor of which was a personal and political friend of Squire Jarvis, gave considerable space to the affair; but, while the writer was careful to say nothing which could be construed as a reflection on the lad's honesty, nevertheless, he scouted the idea that Ed Rickson was in any way implicated in the crime.

On Monday morning Will returned to duty in the engine-room, as the first and second floors of the factory were in shape to resume operation.

Nothing had been heard from Squire Jarvis in respect to the promissory note.

This, of course, was a matter of no surprise to Mrs. Somers or her son, for it was not supposed that any action could be taken until the missing note should have been recovered.

A thorough search for the mislaid receipt had proved unavailing.

In spite of the fact that Sam Travis regarded the flooding of the swamp as a hair-brain sort of proposition, nevertheless he was, boy-like, interested in the project, if only for the purpose of being the first to give his friend Will the laugh as soon as he had assured himself that the scheme was a failure, as he confidently expected that it must prove to be.

So, during the week that followed the repairing of the dam, he made daily visits to the ten-acre bog after school.

As a matter of course, the change, if any, in that short time in the appearance of the swamp was not so perceptible to him as if he had waited a week and then inspected it.

So at the end of eight days he reported to Will that the bog had not changed, even a little bit.

"You are quite certain of that?" asked Will, with a shade of disappointment in his voice.

"Sure thing" asserted Sam, shaking his head dismally. "Same old grass and moss, though it looks a bit more soggy. There are a lot of little pools here and there, but that don't count for anything."

"Well, I'm going out to take a look myself to-night. The moon will be up after eight o'clock, and there should be light enough for me to see all I want."

So after supper Will started off alone for the swamp-lot to size up the appearance of his game of chance.

He had arrived within a hundred yards of the place when he heard some one shouting in accents of terror, and the appeal undoubtedly came from the immediate vicinity of the quaking bog.

"Somebody must have got caught in the swamp. It's as bad as quicksand," he said, as he broke into a run.

The moon was just rising about the tops of the trees that partially surrounded the swamp-lot, so that the boy could easily see over the whole surface of the bog.

The call for help sounded in the vicinity of the dam, and thither Will directed his steps.

He soon made out a dark object floundering about on the surface of the swamp a few yards out.

"Hello!" he shouted encouragingly.

"Help! Help!" answered the unfortunate being.

A long broken limb was hanging pendant from a tree nearby.

The boy seized it, and by a stout pull disengaged it from the heavy limb on which it had grown.

Then he ran down to the edge of the morass, called to the struggling person imprisoned by the matted grass, and flung one end of the improvised pole toward him.

The luckless person grabbed it as a drowning man might a plank, and held on with desperate energy until Will succeeded in dragging him to the firm ground.

"Give me both your hands now!" cried the boy.

They were eagerly extended to him.

Planting his feet firmly, Will gave a mighty tug, the person's feet were suddenly released by the grass, and both rolled over together on the dry turf beyond the danger line.

They immediately struggled to their feet and looked at one another.

The moon shone full in the face of the rescued stranger.

Will recognized him instantly.

"Ed Rickson!" he exclaimed.

The fellow hastily scrambled to his feet without a word, and made a movement as if about to flee.

"Hold on, Rickson. You needn't be in such a sweat. I'm all alone," said Will.

Rickson paused and looked keenly at the boy, and then gave a short laugh, as if somewhat reassured.

"Oh, it's you, Somers, is it?"

"It isn't anybody else. Where have you been hiding these last ten days?"

"Who says I've been hiding?" said Rickson gruffly.

"I say so, for one. And there are others."

"Look here, Will Somers, do you want to do me a favor?"

"I think I've just done one for you," said the boy, grimly.

"That's right, you have; but I want you to do something else for me."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Will cautiously.

"I'm kind of fagged out. Haven't had a mouthful today? Will you fetch me something to eat and promise you won't say anything about having seen me out here?"

"You have got a pretty good nerve, I think, after what I've gone through on your account already."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Rickson sharply.

"You used those tools you stole from our place to break into Squire Jarvis' office. Then you left them in the place, and so I was accused of doing the job, because a certain

paper we are supposed to be interested in was found missing."

Ed Rickson grinned as though he had just heard a good joke.

"Oh, well, no harm came of it. Everybody knows you're a little angel who wouldn't be guilty of such a thing," he replied, with a palpable sneer. "A fellow who goes to Sunday-school and meeting regularly never goes wrong, of course not. Canada isn't full of those kind of chaps."

"If you are so anxious to do me a favor you are taking a strange way to get me to accommodate you," said Will, in a tone of disgust at Rickson's coarse humor.

"Only a joke," the now wretched-looking wanderer answered hastily, as if suddenly conscious that he had gone too far. "For heaven's sake, get me a bite of something to eat. I'm almost starved."

He certainly looked it, and there was a pathetic earnestness about his request that easily assured Will that Rickson told the truth.

"Well," said the boy, "I can't refuse a hungry man something to eat; but it'll take me some little time to get it here."

"You won't tell any one you've met me here, will you?" asked Rickson anxiously.

"I shan't volunteer the information."

"And you promise not to fetch anybody back with you? I shall be on the watch, so it won't do any good."

"I'll return alone," said Will coldly.

"I wish you'd fetch a blanket with you, if you could, for it's mighty cold hanging around here, especially when a fellow's trousers are soaked to the skin," said Rickson dismally.

"Where do you sleep?" asked Will, as he prepared to depart on his charitable errand.

"I've got a snug place," he replied, with one of his impudent grins. "Now, don't be any longer than you can help, Somers, if you've got a spark of feeling for a fellow in my condition," and Rickson contorted his countenance into an expression of great physical anguish in order to give additional effect to his appeal.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH WILL SOMERS LEARNS SOME INTERESTING FACTS OF A CONSPIRACY OF WHICH HE WAS THE INTENDED VICTIM.

Will was as good as his word, and half an hour later returned to the ten-acre swamp-lot with a liberal supply of plain food, which his mother had provided at his request, without asking any questions he could not answer. He had it wrapped up in a newspaper, the whole tucked into the folds of an old horse blanket.

When Will struck the open space facing the bog, where he had held his brief conversation with the disreputable son of Job Rickson, he found no one in sight.

"He couldn't have got tired waiting, for I wasn't so very long away," thought the kind-hearted boy, as he transferred his bundle from one arm to the other. "Well, it's his

lookout, so while I'm waiting for him I'll take a look at the swamp."

So he walked slowly along the edge of the quaking bog, examining its surface with the greatest attention and interest.

He had taken care to gauge the original height of the marsh before he began to flood it, marking its level by means of sticks thrust horizontally out from the sides of the basin.

By looking at these guides he saw that so far the swamp itself had not risen to any noticeable extent.

This was encouraging, though not conclusive evidence that his scheme would eventually be successful.

The water was certainly forming on top of the matted grass.

A hundred little pools were visible upon its surface, which looked very watery and glistening in the cold moonshine.

"I don't think I can find any reason to kick so far," mused Will, with a sense of satisfaction. "In another week I hope to see a clear enough, though perhaps shallow, sheet of water above the grass. Well, the saying is, nothing ventured, nothing won. You have got to take chances in this world if you expect to do something worth while."

At this point in his reflections he fancied he heard the sound of voices somewhere near at hand.

He was standing at the side of the swamp opposite the outlet where the dam was.

He listened.

It was the first of November and the country air was quite still.

There was scarcely a breath of air stirring, and the bare trees stood silent and motionless in the moonlight.

"Somebody is talking, all right," said Will to himself, "which is a pretty good sign he isn't alone. I wonder if that can be Rickson? If so, who is he talking with? He seemed to be mighty skeery about any one knowing he was out here. Well, that's his business, not mine."

Will walked on a little further, and the sounds grew plainer.

"That's Rickson talking, for a fact. Evidently he has run across some friend he isn't afraid of."

The boy sat down on the stump of a tree, and now the voices reached his ear quite plainly.

"Look here, Lewis," said Rickson, roughly, as if he was out of patience, "I've stood your shillyshallying long enough. I want that money you promised me, and if you don't stump up by this time to-morrow night I'll not only find means of letting your father know the truth of the matter, but I'll put Will Somers wise to the whole thing, also."

"You wouldn't dare!" ejaculated Jarvis, for it was indeed the son of the magnate of Northport who was holding converse with Ed Rickson in the shade of the trees.

"Wouldn't I? You evidently don't know me, young fellow. You see the trouble I've got into all on your account. I don't dare show my face lest I be arrested for the crime you intended to fasten on Will Somers."

"If you hadn't been such a fool that night when you broke in Somers' tool-house to get those tools, and let him recognize you, he never would have been able to throw suspicion in your direction."

"He came on me so suddenly that he took me by surprise. I supposed every body was in bed and asleep," said Rickson in excuse.

"You should have waited an hour or two longer, anyway. You spoiled everything by your haste. If the plan had succeeded, as I supposed it would when I proposed the thing to you when I met you in Gateville, I would have given you the money right away. It wasn't my fault you tangled things up the way you did."

"Well, I've earned the price we agreed on, and I'm going to have it, or somebody will have to suffer, that's all there is to it," said Ed Rickson doggedly.

"You haven't earned it, for the scheme failed. Nobody outside of my father believes Will Somers guilty of breaking into the governor's office, and I wouldn't be surprised if my father has his suspicions."

"He'll have more than that if you don't fork over that hundred dollars you promised me," said Rickson, in a threatening tone.

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars to-morrow."

"No, you won't. You'll give me the hundred. Do you understand? I'm sorry I went into the thing, anyway. Somers isn't a half bad sort of chap. He pulled me out of the swamp here an hour ago, and I expect him back with some grub, something that I need as bad as any man alive. Next time you want any dirty work done, just look up somebody else to do it. If I was to give you away to Somers he'd probably thump the stuffing out of you, and 'twould serve you right."

"He'd thump nothing out of me," sneered Lewis angrily. "I hate the pauper. I'd have given a hundred dollars willingly to have seen him gone to jail."

"For a crime he is innocent of, eh?" said Rickson, with a sneer. "You're a peach."

"That's none of your business!" retorted his companion, in an ugly tone.

"All right. Cough up the hundred dollars and we'll let it go at that. I'll let you have the papers back, and you can say you found them in the grass outside your house. If you fail me, young fellow, you'll find yourself in a heap of trouble."

"I'll have you arrested if you dare to do anything like that!" cried Lewis hotly.

"You will, you little monkey!" exclaimed Rickson, grabbing him by the arm. "I've a great mind to chuck you into the marsh."

"Let me go, will you!"

"Are you going to fetch me that hundred dollars?"

His manner was so menacing that Lewis Jarvis yielded in his fright.

"Yes, I'll give it to you."

"Then see that you turn up here to-morrow night with the cash. If you try to trick me I'll make you suffer in a way that you won't soon forget."

"I'll get even with you some day for this, Ed Rickson, see if I don't," said the young aristocrat darkly as he backed away.

"All right, my buck; but I advise you not to try it," said Rickson with a harsh laugh.

Lewis muttered something under his breath and then walked off under the trees.

A moment later Will Somers saw Rickson pushing his way through the bushes toward the open spot of their encounter an hour previous.

So he rose from his seat and followed him.

When Rickson came out into the moonlight he discovered Will within a few yards of him.

"Hello!" he said, with a hungry glance at the bundle. "You've fetched the grub, have you! Let's have it."

Will relinquished possession of the blanket and its contents.

Rickson unrolled the bundle, cast the blanket on the ground, and attacked the package of food with the greediness of a famished hyena.

"Somers, you're all right," said Rickson, with his mouth full.

"I wish I could return the compliment," replied Will coldly. "You stole a hammer and chisel from our toolhouse for the deliberate purpose of getting me into trouble."

"Who says I did?" replied Rickson, with a malicious grin.

"I say so."

"You're off your base, Somers."

"Am I? Perhaps you'll not admit that Lewis Jarvis hired you to execute the job?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Rickson, evidently astonished at the extent of Will's knowledge on the subject. "What put that into your head?"

"No matter," replied Will, coolly. "Isn't it a fact?"

"You're dreaming, boy!"

"Look here, Rickson; I think I've treated you pretty white. I pulled you out of a bad hole and brought you a square feed. Why don't you own up?"

"Nothing doing," grinned Ed.

"Then I've got nothing more to say," said Will, turning on his heel and starting off.

Ed Rickson allowed him to go without another word.

"A nice pair, he and Lewis Jarvis," muttered Will as he walked slowly homeward. "A rascally piece of business for the son of Northport's most prominent citizen and such a reckless scamp as Ed Rickson to engage in, to try and down a boy who never did either of them any harm. Rickson has that note in his possession, so I'll just give Constable Brady a quiet tip that these two conspirators have arranged to meet in the vicinity of the ten-acre swamp-plot to-morrow night. It is not impossible that Lewis Jarvis may find that his little scheme has developed into a boomerang, which may land him and his side partner in jail on a very serious charge. It's a poor rule that doesn't work both ways."

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH LEWIS JARVIS ORIGINATES ANOTHER SCHEME FOR THE UNDOING OF WILL SOMERS.

On the following evening Constable Brady and an assistant visited the woods about the ten-acre swamp-plot, but failed to find any trace of Ed Rickson or his associate in iniquity.

So the matter rested for the present.

Whether Lewis Jarvis had paid the hundred dollars or effected some kind of a compromise with Ed Rickson, Will Somers had no means of knowing.

The matter had undoubtedly been satisfactorily arranged between them, as young Jarvis maintained his usual bold front in public, which showed he felt no apprehension of exposure.

During the next ten days evidence of the successful flooding of the swamp-plot was so apparent that even Sam Travis hauled in his horns, and said to all his friends that if there was a smarter boy in Northport than Will Somers he'd like to make his acquaintance.

Will's silly attempt to fill up the bog with stones the preceding winter, which everybody who had heard about the matter supposed to be his object, had been generally forgotten.

Now, however, when it began to be known that a pond had actually formed in the basin of the swamp-plot, scores of curious townspeople tramped out to the spot to see the miracle with their own eyes.

There it was, sure enough.

It was a fine pond of water, and was daily growing deeper.

Somebody carried the news to Job Rickson.

"Ridiculous!" was his comment.

"But I've just seen it with my own eyes," protested his informant, rather glad than otherwise to rub it in on the old fellow who was so generally disliked.

"Pooh! You can't tell me any such nonsense," grunted the man who had already burned his fingers with the scheme of originating an ice privilege.

All the same, as soon as his visitor had gone he put on an old hat and started out to convince himself that the man had been jollying him.

Needless to say, he found what he neither expected nor desired to see.

"It seems that Will Somers has the bulge on you, after all," said a neighbor who had also come to inspect the marvel, rubbing his hands gleefully, as if Rickson's take-down particularly pleased him.

At first Job Rickson was too much astonished to speak. He could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes.

But after awhile he began to realize that somehow nature had turned him down in favor of the young fireman of the Northport cotton mills.

Then he made a few marks that could hardly be reproduced with propriety in print, but they expressed his sentiments on the subject with unpolished directness.

When Will first took hold of the scheme the person who most persistently jeered him was Lewis Jarvis.

"What else can you expect from such a lobster?" was his sneering comment.

Then, as time went on, he, like others, forgot all about the matter.

Now its revival as a successful issue jarred on his feelings.

He refused to believe all reports concerning the actual flooding of the swamp-lot, until the Northport papers printed a news item on the subject; then he went out to the site of the quaking bog himself, and what he saw did not make him feel happy.

He comprehended that the young mechanic he despised so much had managed to solve a very clever problem.

"I never saw such a piece of luck," he muttered in a tone of disgust. "When that water freezes through the pauper will have a regular ice harvest to dispose of. It's a shame how luck will play into the hands of the common people! Why, that beggar will think he's as good as I am. If I only knew some way to head him off."

He was standing near the dam, and as he spoke an idea came into his head that pleased him greatly.

"I'll be just the thing," he grinned malevolently. "By the great hornspron! I'll take him down a couple of pegs. It'll break him all up to have his great scheme go up in the air at the last moment. This is better than if I had landed him in jail, for he was bound to get clear of that in the end; but this—well, this will pickle his hopes in great shape. It'll be a dead easy cinch for Ed Rickson to earn another twenty-five bones. Then I guess it'll be time for me to find that note and hand it over to the governor. He'll do the rest. Nothing like rubbing it in good and hard when you get the chance."

That afternoon Lewis Jarvis took a train for a certain town thirty miles away, where he knew he should be able to find Ed Rickson.

As a matter of fact Ed was on the lookout for him, for Lewis had agreed with him to settle his hundred dollar obligation after paying him twenty-five dollars down, and the first of these payments was now due.

"I thought you wouldn't go back on me," grinned young Rickson significantly when Lewis turned up at the appointed rendezvous, a roadhouse on the outskirts of the town, where Rickson had secured employment congenial to his tastes.

"Why should I?" answered Lewis, as if offended at the very idea of such a thing.

He had an ax to grind, and it behooved him to keep on friendly terms with his former co-partner in guilt.

"That's right! Why should you?" said Rickson. "I s'pose you have brought the cash?" he added eagerly.

"Sure thing," and Lewis produced twenty-five dollars in notes, which he handed over.

"You're a little man of your word, Lewis," said Ed stowing the money away. "Come inside and have a drink."

Lewis was not accustomed to intoxicating liquor, as the Squire very properly frowned upon any such indulgence

in his own son, whose sole form of dissipation was confined to a superior brand of imported cigarettes; but the boy was ashamed to refuse Rickson's invitation lest Ed twit him as a milk sop.

Secretly he believed drinking was a manly art, for he had seen his father slightly under the influence of stimulants on several occasions, and the recollection of his parent's weakness in this respect stilled his own conscience.

So he stood up to the bar, and Ed poured out a couple of whiskies.

"Here's luck," said Rickson, swallowing his like a veteran.

Lewis' portion nearly strangled him, for it was a fiery compound and none of the best.

"Went the wrong way did it?" grinned Ed. "Take some water."

Lewis presented a sad picture as he stood gasping over the dose, which had brought tears to his eyes.

Indeed, it is always a sad picture to see a young man—it was far worse in this case, for Lewis Jarvis was only seventeen—taking his first lessons in that curse of civilization, liquor drinking.

That it is the root of all evil is graphically illustrated in that piece of Oriental fiction called the "Arabian Nights," which recites that a genie, or wicked spirit, having obtained control over a certain young man, agreed to spare his life on condition that his dupe should commit one of three mortal sins—either to murder his father, curse his God, or get drunk: The young man chose what he considered the least of the three. He got drunk, with the result that on being taxed with his sin by his father, he, in a burst of fury, killed him; then, realizing his crime, he in despair cursed his Maker and the day he was born.

Lewis Jarvis soon recovered from the effects of the potion, and after a short conversation on sporting topics he broached the real object of his visit.

"How is that for an idea?" grinned Lewis, proud of the mean scheme he had devised. "I'll have him dead to rights, eh?"

"You've got a great head, Lewis," said Rickson with a sneer. "So you want me to sneak into Northport again and work it for you?"

"Yes."

"How much do I get?"

"Twenty-five dollars."

"Cash down?"

"Yes; but you'll have to give me more time on what I owe you on the old account."

Rickson considered a few minutes and then agreed to the proposal.

"When do you want it done?"

"Any time within a week will do."

"All right. Have another drink," and the hardened young fellow replenished the tumblers.

Lewis looked at his portion and hesitated.

"What's the matter?" laughed Rickson banteringly. "Can't you go two drinks?"

"Sure!" replied Lewis, flushing up as he grasped the glass.

"Maybe you had better dilute it," grinned Ed, tantalizingly.

"Pooh!" cried Lewis, raising it to his chin. "I'm no baby."

All the same, the liquor gave him another coughing fit, and he was glad to take some water afterward.

When he boarded the train for home half an hour later he was rather unsteady on his legs.

CHAPTER XVI.

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."

The railroad station was not far from the Northport cotton mills, and Lewis Jarvis had to pass the factory on his way home.

He had not noticed Jessie Fairweather since the evening Will Somers had interfered between them in her behalf.

And with good reason, for the spirited girl took good care to keep out of his way, having no desire for any further intercourse with him.

Lewis was feeling somewhat exalted from the stimulating effect of bad whisky on his brain.

As he came along the factory girls were leaving the mills, the full force having been put to work that day for the first time since the fire.

Jessie was walking slowly down the street in expectation that Will would soon catch up with her, as usual.

He had not yet appeared when Lewis Jarvis saw her ahead.

The sight of her at this moment aroused all that was ugly in his disposition.

He hastened his steps and soon caught up with her.

"Going to speak with me this time, aren't you?" he demanded in a husky voice, and with a half-intoxicated leer that startled the girl.

Jessie made no answer, but started to cross to the other side of the road, when he put out his hand and roughly detained her.

"Going to answer me or not?" he said menacingly.

"Let me alone, Will Jarvis!" she cried angrily. "You wouldn't dare touch me if Will Somers was here."

"What do I care for Somers?" he returned with a hic-cough. "Mis'able pauper! Common upstart! Thinks he's as good as me. Know who I am, don't you?"

"I believe you have been drinking," cried Jessie in dismay.

"Been drinking? Sure thing. All gen-lemen drink. My father, Squire, most important gen'lmen in town—he drinks. So do I."

"If you don't take your hand from my arm, Lewis Jarvis," cried Jessie, desperately, "I'll slap your face."

"Which face? This face?" asked Lewis, with drunken humor. "You will slap nothing, see! I've got you now, and I'm going to kiss you!"

At this threat Jessie struck him full in the face, but he seized her in both his arms and tried to carry out his purpose.

Jessie, unable to help herself further, uttered a shrill scream, which reached Will's ears as he was coming out of the engine-yard gate.

The boy started to her assistance at once.

He was full of fight this time and furious at seeing her struggling in the grasp of a well-dressed ruffian, for he did not at once recognize Lewis Jarvis.

Coming up at a run, he seized Lewis bodily as the young aristocrat was bending back her head to accomplish his reckless object, and, tearing him away from the girl, he flung him in a heap against the fence.

"Oh, Will!" cried Jessie, impulsively throwing her arms about his neck, and, dropping her face on his shoulder, she burst into hysterical weeping.

"What was he trying to do, Jessie?"

"Oh, he, he—was going—to—kiss me!" she sobbed like a frightened child.

"It's Lewis Jarvis, is it?" he cried, in some astonishment, now recognizing the Squire's son, as that reckless youth staggered to his feet with a fierce scowl on his features.

"Yes, and he's been drinking!" shuddered the girl.

"Oh, he has!"

"I'll get square with you for that, Will Somers!" yelled Lewis furiously. "I will, if I have to die for it."

"Come along, Jessie," said Will, ignoring the vengeful youth.

Lewis shook his fist after them as they passed on.

"You pauper, you! I'll fix that dam for you and burst your whole scheme up! Do you understand? You'll strike me, will you, you beggar! I'll fix you! Just see if I don't!" he screamed out.

Will heard the threat, but he and Jessie went on as if Lewis had spoken to the empty air.

Lewis watched them out of sight before he left the spot.

It was getting dark now, and he managed to reach home without attracting any comment.

Fortunately for him, his father was absent in Boston on business, and so he escaped a well-merited reprimand for the condition he was in.

That week Will received from Washington a certificate, confirming to him for the usual number of years the patent rights on his improved damper regulator, and the superintendent made an agreement with his mother, as his guardian, for its use in the factory engine-room on a regular royalty.

Specifications for his new steam economizer and condenser were at the same time drawn up and forwarded to a patent attorney in the Capitol City to be patented, and we may as well state here that in due time he sold the rights to the Northport cotton mills for five thousand dollars.

Superintendent Harper had, at Will's request, visited the swamp-lot and investigated the outlook.

His verdict assured the boy that he would have a ten-acre field of ice in due course to sell to the Rockland Ice Company, which was in the market for such privileges as soon as they were ripe.

"How did you manage it?" asked Mr. Harper curiously. "You seem to have had better luck than Mr. Rickson." And then Will told him all about it.

"Upon my word, you are a bright boy, for a fact. I never should have thought of that plan myself had I been in your shoes. Well, you deserve all your luck. Your game of chance has turned out to be a game of certainty, after all."

As they left the spot they did not see a crouching form hiding in the underbrush.

It was Ed Rickson, and he had a crowbar with him.

As soon as all was still again he clambered out on the dam, and inserting the end of the bar between the narrow crack in the boards, began to pry them apart.

His object was apparent.

He meant to make a sufficiently large opening in the dam to allow the confined water to escape.

By morning the prospects of an ice harvest on the ten-acre lot would be ruined, for that season at least.

Fortunately, the plans of the wicked do not always prosper.

When Will reached home he missed his big horn-handled jack-knife, which was a handy companion in the engine-room repair shop.

"By George!" he said. "I remember I laid that down on one of the stringers of the dam while I was talking to Mr. Harper. I must go back and get it."

So he hastily retraced his steps.

As he drew near the dam he heard queer sounds, not unlike the ripping of boards, and he began to wonder.

"Great Scott! It can't be those boards are giving away under the pressure of the water! If they are the pond will be ruined in a few hours."

He rushed forward to investigate.

At that moment the moon, which had been obscured all evening, suddenly shone out between a rift in the clouds, and Will saw something that staggered him.

It was Ed Rickson hard at work in his effort to destroy the dam.

"Hi, there! What are you doing?" Will cried in astonished anger.

Rickson turned in a startled way and dropped the crowbar into the water.

"Come out of that!" exclaimed Will.

"Go to thunder!" replied the rascal.

"So it's you, Ed Rickson. You're a nice scoundrel, you are, trying to spoil my property," ejaculated Will, as mad as he could be when he came to realize the despicable attempt to ruin his ice privilege.

"Well, it's me, all right," replied Rickson, in surly tones, for he saw the game was up, especially as the crowbar was gone. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to hand you over to Constable Brady right away."

"You tell it well, you little monkey. If I get hold of you I'll polish you off quicker'n greased lightning."

And he meant it, too.

Now, it happened that Will's blood was up, and so reck-

less of consequences was he that he clambered out on the dam, determined to bring Ed Rickson to justice at last.

Ed saw him coming and waited with a diabolical grin.

He was satisfied he could easily handle Will Somers, as stout a lad as he looked.

When they tackled in the center of the dam he found out that the job was not as easy as he had supposed.

It was a pretty even thing, however, as to which would come out ahead.

"Wait until I get a good grip on you and I'll toss you into your pond, blast you!" gritted Ed.

As they struggled and struck at one another on top of the dam they were in alternate light and shadow, as the moon shone down upon their writhing forms or hid her face behind a drifting cloud.

It was a fight to the finish, and no mistake.

Will was a bit overmatched but not outclassed.

With all his fighting qualities aroused he was crowding his more experienced antagonist pretty hard.

He was strong and tough, and his fists were like small sledge hammers.

Every time they landed on Rickson he grunted, while Will took his own punishment in silence, never yielding an inch to his antagonist at any stage, though the blood trickled from a nasty cut over his eye.

At length Will's greater power of endurance began to prevail.

Taking advantage of this, the boy ducked down, seized Ed's leg below the knee, and jerking it up, overbalanced his antagonist, who pitched sideways into the water of the pond.

That ended the fight.

Rickson came up from his plunge completely subdued.

It was not improbable that had he been left to himself he might have been drowned, so exhausted was he.

Will, however, grabbed him by the collar of his jacket and slowly dragged him to firm ground. He then took the precaution to bind his hands behind his back.

Will marched his prisoner to the residence of Constable Brady, a quarter of a mile away, who took him to the town jail.

Next day Will Somers went before Justice Benson and swore out a complaint of malicious mischief against Ed Rickson.

Ed lost no time in sending for Lewis Jarvis.

"Get me out of this, do you understand?" he said to Lewis when that lad appeared, "or I'll blow the whole business from beginning to end."

Lewis, terrified at the thought of public exposure, promised to enlist his father in Rickson's behalf.

In order to secure the Squire's co-operation, it is probable that Lewis made a clean breast of the matter to his father.

At any rate, Squire Jarvis appeared for Ed when he was brought before Justice Benson; the prisoner was also charged with burglarizing the lawyer's office.

The nabob, of course, refused to press this charge, and

as there was not sufficient evidence against the rascal it was allowed to drop.

Will, with Sam Travis' assistance, recovered the short crowbar with which Rickson had intended to break down the dam and produced it against the prisoner.

Rickson flatly denied that he had used it against Will's property with malicious intent, but both Will and Sam, as well as Constable Brady, who had visited the dam, testified to the abrasures in the boards, which admitted of but one construction, so Ed was adjudged guilty by the justice and sentenced to thirty days' imprisonment.

A day or so later Squire Jarvis called on Mrs. Somers and notified her that, the promissory note having been recovered, she would be held for its payment.

When Will came home from the factory his mother told him of the Squire's visit.

"We'll contest it, mother, on the ground of fraud. Call on Sam Travis' father. He's a good lawyer, and he will advise you in the matter."

After supper Jessie Fairweather came in, as she often did, to show Mrs. Somers a new dress pattern she had received from Boston.

"I've got something to tell you, Will," she said, while Mrs. Somers was out of the room for a short interval, "but you must promise not to say a word about it to any one."

"All right," said Will, "I promise."

"Tessie Rickson came to me to-day and begged that I would become friendly with her again, for she said as long as she and I were not on speaking terms none of the other girls would notice her. She admitted that it was she who put her pocketbook in the pocket of my dress on the day of the fire, in the hope of disgracing me. She said Lewis Jarvis had put her up to it, and had told her I had said many unkind things about her, which, of course, was not so; and she now knows that Lewis Jarvis simply made a dupe of her in order to get square with me. But the worst thing of all, Will, she confessed to me that she was the cause of the fire at the mill, and told me why she set a match to the dresses of certain girls without thinking any further damage would result. She's a thoughtless girl, with very poor principles, and I feel sorry for her."

"She'd get into a peck of trouble if it became known that she started the fire at the factory," said Will, not a little astonished at the revelation.

"Well, I must be going," Jessie said, as Mrs. Somers returned to the room. "Why, what's the matter with the clock? It must be half-past eight now, yet the hands point to a quarter past seven, just as they did when I entered the room."

"Evidently it has stopped," said Will, walking up to the mantelpiece.

He took up the little Dutch timepiece and began to examine it.

"The heat must have warped the bottom, for the pendulum has caught on a swelling in the wood."

While fumbling with it the bottom suddenly came away in his hand, and a small piece of folded paper dropped out.

Jessie picked it up and handed it to Mrs. Somers, who casually opened it.

"Why, Will," she said in a tone of mingled surprise and joy, "here is the missing receipt at last."

"You don't mean it, mother!" exclaimed the boy in amazement.

His mother passed it to him.

"Received of Nathaniel Somers the sum of three hundred and six dollars, in full satisfaction of his note of hand bearing date of—" read Will. "And it is signed by Job Rickson. That settles it, mother. You don't want a lawyer now."

"Isn't that splendid!" exclaimed Jessie, clapping her hands with pleasure. "How fortunate that the dear old clock stopped."

"The clock your father gave us, too," added Will. "You were the first who noticed that it had stopped business—for the first time since it came into our possession. I think you deserve a reward. Don't she, mother?" as he laid down the curious old timepiece.

"A reward, you silly—oh!"

She could not help the exclamation, because just at that moment Will unexpectedly kissed her.

Will allowed the case to be brought into court, and then, when Squire Jarvis was gloating over the bill of costs he thought Widow Somers would have to pay, she produced the receipt, and covered both the nabob and Job Rickson with confusion.

The same day, too, Will was waited on by three members of the town council and presented with the gold medal, appropriately inscribed, which had been awarded to him in recognition of his heroism at the factory fire.

Will Somers' ten-acre pond produced an ice privilege in January which netted him something like three thousand dollars.

Not only that, but the swamp-lot thereafter annually netted him a similar sum, so that his game of chance after all resulted in a permanent income.

"Just enough for you and I to buy a nice little house and start housekeeping with in a year or two," he said to Jessie when he showed her his first check from the Rockland Ice Company.

And Jessie blushed radiantly and clapped her pretty fingers over his mouth.

THE END.

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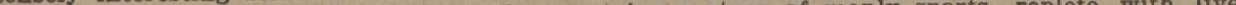
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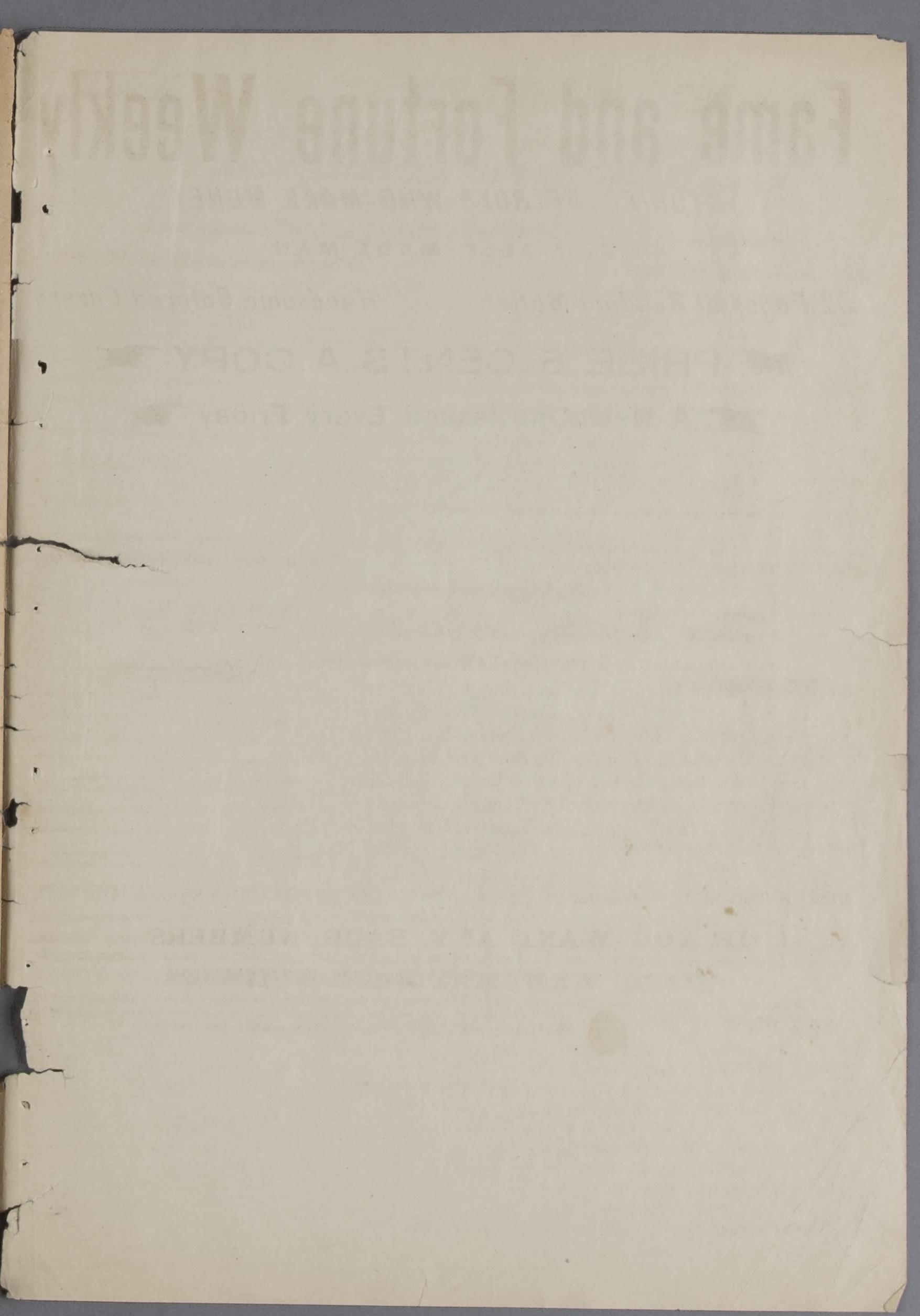
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